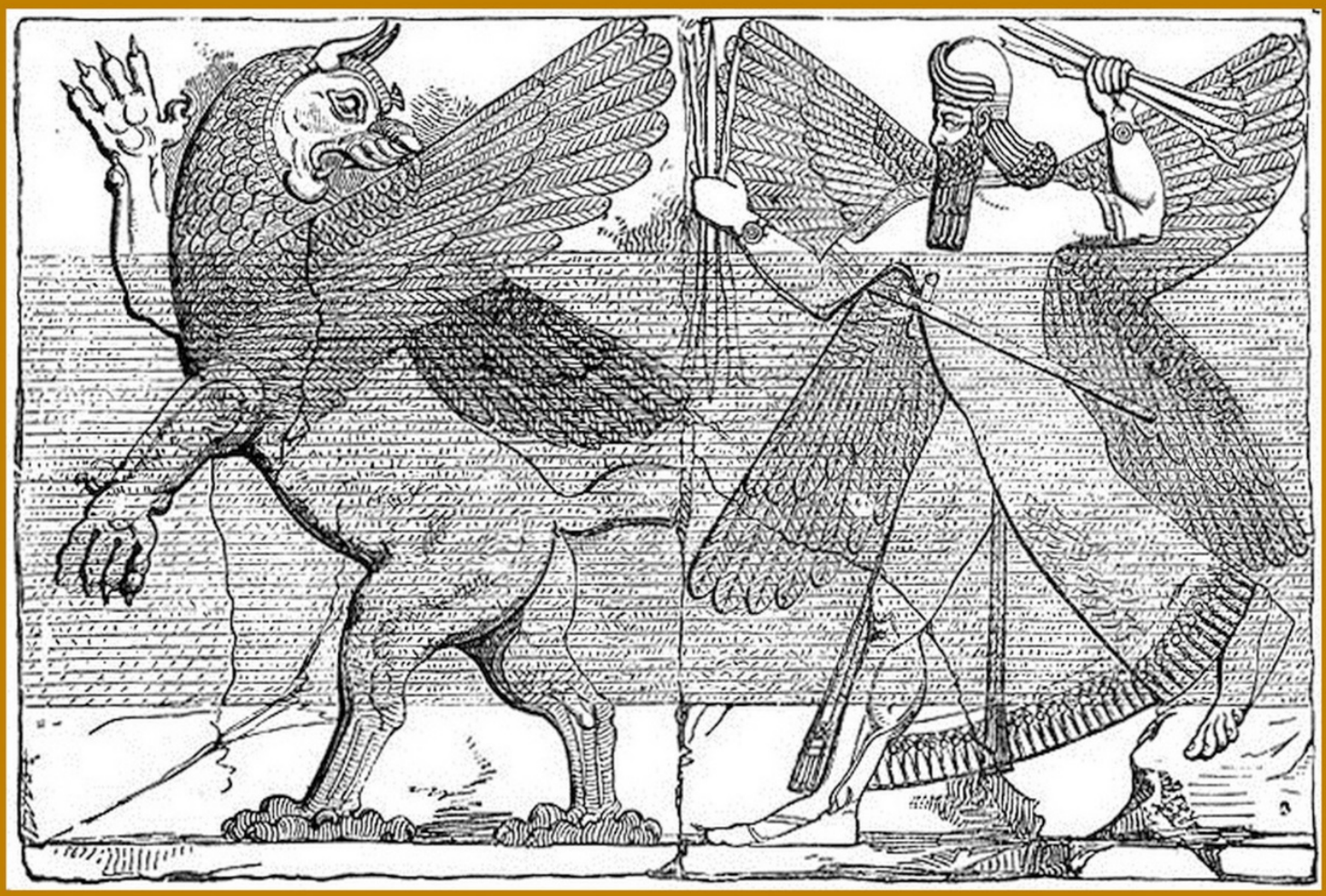
Understanding Ancient Thought



Thomas Yaeger

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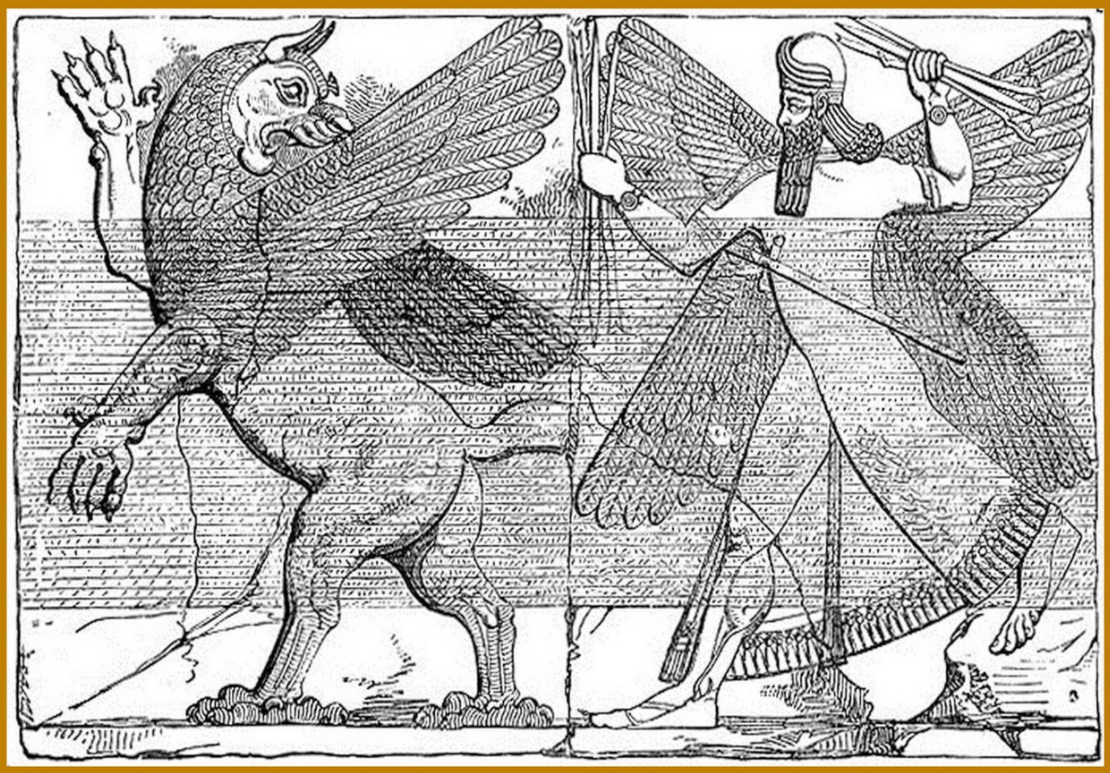

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Preface

This book is a compilation of eighteen essays drawn from a number of different times and places. Some short, some long. All of them are meditations on our understanding of history (mostly ancient history), on the importance of philosophical ideas in antiquity, and also on our understanding of the human mind, then and now. Some of them amplify on the discussion in my first book, *The Sacred History of Being*, and so it is referenced occasionally.

The ancient world is often very mysterious to us, since those who peopled that world lived and thought within quite different models of reality. After the passage of two millennia, it is hard for us to make sense of the assemblage of information which has survived the enormous passage of time. Sometimes the nature of the evidence is problematic, and sometimes our approach to that evidence is the problem: we carry intellectual baggage which often makes it very difficult to know and understand what we are looking at.

In essence, this collection of essays attempts, as far as possible, to understand the ancient world within its original context, and to highlight where modern thought and the modern mind introduce obstacles to what can be understood.

This is not a textbook. A number of the essays in this collection advance radical arguments, and therefore students preparing course essays should be careful in what they choose to reference. The purpose of writing these is to advance our understanding of the ancient world, not to outline the

current consensus view in academia. If the latter is what you are after, you need to look elsewhere.

Which are the most radical of the essays? They are: Divination in Antiquity; Being, Knowledge and Belief in Israel; The Concept of the Plenum in Babylon; Pleroma, Cosmos, and Physical Existence; Logical Modality in Classical Athens; Sameness and Difference in Plato; Shar Kishati, and the Cult of Eternity; Teotihuacan and the river of Mercury; Frazer and the Association of Ideas; and Cultural Parallels and False Narratives. Which means that ten of the eighteen essays do not reflect a consensus view among scholars. The essay on Frazer really should not be understood to be controversial, but it is safer to include it in this list, since it approaches Frazer's work from an unorthodox angle.

The other less controversial essays mostly collect together evidence and argument.

A few notes on spellings. Like *The Sacred History of Being*, this is a cross-disciplinary work, which quotes from a wide variety of sources. Greek text has been kept to a minimum, and has been transliterated into roman letters, so it can be pronounced as it appears. A dash over a vowel indicates that it is long. Thus an 'ō indicates the omega, which is a long vowel, as in 'zōon.' Pronunciation of Sumerian and Akkadian words is not settled and secure, and since I've quoted from different writers, the same names appear in slightly different forms, such as Apsu/Abzu. I chose not to normalise these throughout the text. Shamash, here rendered in roman letters, may sometimes be found spelled 'Šamaš.' So 'š' is vocalised as 'sh'. Other letters found in Akkadian are: 'ḫ' which is pronounced as a roughly vocalised 'h', close to the 'ch' sound in 'loch'; 'ṣ' is a dental sibilant, which

should be pronounced 'ts' as in 'tsar'. Other indicators of pronunciation can be safely ignored by the reader.

Articles and books consulted are referenced in the endnotes.

I add here summary descriptions of each of the essays, in the order in which they appear in the collection:

Divination in Antiquity, written in the latter stages of *The Sacred History of Being*. It was uploaded as a post to my website, and I promoted the essay by adding in brackets 'and the sense it made'. Most people have no idea why divinatory procedures would ever have made sense in antiquity, but there is a sense to it, once the conceptual model in operation is grasped. This essay explores that conceptual model.

Knowledge and Esoteric Doctrine concerns scholarly disinterest in the role of esoteric ideas and doctrine in ancient models of reality. Partly this disinterest is because the esoteric is, by definition, kept secret and unknown, and partly because it is assumed that esoteric doctrine would have had no connection with abstract and universal ideas known to us, and therefore must remain unintelligible to us, even if we could disinter the details. The first of these appeals to the evidential invisibility of what is esoteric, and the second, to its irrational nature. Plato's esoteric doctrine however is in plain view. We need to look for evidence, rather than presuming that it is not to be had.

Being, Knowledge and Belief in Israel is an expanded version of a chapter which appeared in *The Sacred History of Being* ('The Idea of Being in Israel') which looked at the body of Mesopotamian ideas about the gods

and the divine through the extensive commentary on these ideas present in the books of the Old Testament, and in documents from Assyria. The chapter also explored how Old Testament ideas about images were understood by the Christian writer Tertullian, in the early second century of the common era. Now supplemented by a discussion of the problematic relationship between monotheism and polytheism in the ancient Near East.

The Concept of the Plenum in Babylon argues that the description of Marduk in the Babylonian New Year Festival liturgy (The *Enuma Elish*) and the fact that the described creation was two-fold (it began before Marduk appeared, and was subsequently destroyed), indicates that their creation was understood to emerge from a plenum, in which all things potentially exist. This is an abstract conception which is not supposed to be present in Mesopotamia in the early 1st millennium B.C.E.

Pleroma, Cosmos, and Physical Existence explores the kind of discussion that would necessarily underpin the idea of a plenum or pleroma as the root of physical creation. The discussions closely parallel some of those found in Plato, including the question of whether reality retains its nature after the production of a physical reality.

The Divine and the Limit explores the prominence of Janus in the ritual life of the Romans. In the songs of the Salii ('jumpers' or dancers) he was called the good creator, and the god of gods; he is elsewhere named the oldest of the gods and the beginning of all things. The king, and in later times the rex sacrōrum, sacrificed to him. At every sacrifice he was remembered first; in every prayer he was the first invoked, being mentioned even before Jupiter. He is especially associated with the idea of limit, which is a preoccupation of a number of ancient cultures.

Logical Modality in Classical Athens finds that though we have recognised only one logical modality for more than two millennia, there were in fact two. One of them was appropriate to earthbound existence; the other supplied a rational basis for contact with the divine.

Sameness and Difference in Plato is a further discussion of the idea of the Plenum. Philosophical writing about the divine in the west departed from the consideration of reality as something intricately bound up with a plenum during the Middle Ages, and as a result, philosophical argument about the divine, all the way up to the present day, deals poorly with certain issues, and no longer resembles the kind of argument about the divine found in ancient literature.

Shar Kishati, and the Cult of Eternity is a discussion of the hypothetical core of the ancient understanding of Reality as something which might be separated from everything else (in a Husserlian sense), though it does not mean that such a hypothetical core was separable from the rest of the religious and theological implex of ideas which constituted Greek and Mesopotamian religion. The point of the exercise was to explore what was actually essential to that implex of ideas, and to get a better understanding of why it was important to the functioning of the ritual universe, in both Greece and Mesopotamia.

The Harmony of the Soul explores the idea of Justice discussed in Plato's *Republic*, which argues that the pursuit of special excellences by individuals, in terms of skills, and moral and intellectual virtue, without reference to the activities of other individuals, was understood to result in a harmonious arrangement of society. They are joined together as a consequence of the fact that each of the virtues is complete

and perfected. A parallel notion of the virtue of special excellences in ancient Assyria is discussed in the chapter ‘Standing in the Place of Ea’.

Synoikismos and the Origins of the Polis discusses what we know of the idea of the polis, which appears to have been modelled according to a conception of the divine. Thucydides tells us that, from the time of the first kings down to Theseus (the legendary founder of Athens, whose name is probably related to the verb tithemi, "to set in place") the people of Attica always lived in (their own) poleis; unless there was some common danger they would not come together in council with the king, but each individual polis would govern itself. Theseus did away with the multiplicity of poleis and their separate councils and governments.

Teotihuacan and the river of Mercury explores the symbolic function of this highly reflective metal, recently found inside a tomb in Mexico and known, on the basis of historical records, to be present also inside the Qin tomb in China, and finds parallels with such ideas (mirroring the heavens to provide connection between transcendent reality and the earthly world) in both Greece and in Mesopotamia.

Beyond the Religious Impulse Sometimes the important bit of evidence which will enable us to make sense of something is present, but not recognised, because the scholar is asking the wrong questions, and possibly asking questions within the wrong analytical paradigm. In fact there is a very large quantity of material available to scholars which can tell us much about the intellectual life of the ancient world, but because of the contemporary intellectual and cultural landscape, with its relatively inflexible interpretative structures, developed over many years, it simply cannot be seen for what it is. Worse, if the evidence is present but

indicates counter-intuitive conclusions, it is unlikely ever to become part of the discussion. Better to grasp at straws.

Frazer and the Association of Ideas Like other scholars, then and now, Frazer did not recognise the other logical modality in classical Athens, though he read the relevant texts. Instead, he devised an explanatory mechanism of his own. This was based on the phenomenon of the association of ideas, argued by John Locke in the seventeenth century as a description of how we think. Applying this to human behaviour across history and cultures, he concluded that much human cultural activity could be understood in terms of intellectual error. The phenomenon of the association of ideas is real enough. But it isn't the basis of religious life in antiquity.

Aristotle's Four Causes We recognise only one cause in the modern world, which is the efficient cause. This is concerned with work, energy and power. In antiquity Aristotle described four causes, which are discussed here. Did Aristotle conjure these by himself, or were these concepts understood across the civilised world for centuries before Classical Greece?

Cultural Parallels and False Narratives discusses our understanding of what religion is, the etymology of the word (including Cicero's definition), and compares the Hindu concept of religion with those of Greece and Rome. The evidence makes more sense if we talk instead in terms of divine cult.

Plato's Point of View Plato's main concern was what was truly real, which remained necessarily unchanging and itself, and therefore could not be present, at least as itself, in the world of the here and now. This is not however, how Plato is understood or represented by modern philosophers.

Standing in the Place of Ea explores the role of the King in ancient Assyria, as the vizier of the god Ashur. He was trained in the Adapa discipline,

which is related to the myth of Adapa. He was required to be skilled in crafts, spear-throwing, scholarship, mathematics, divination, etc., and to excel other men, as chosen for the role by Ashur. Thus he would emulate the knowledge and power of Ea, the divine sage whose home was the Abzu, the abyss at the root of creation.

Thomas Yaeger, Aug 4, 2017

Divination in Antiquity

Much sacred practice in the ancient world can be understood as attempts either to understand the mind of the divine (to 'divine' it), or to understand more fully the nature and state of the mundane world through access to the gods, or, to have a more intimate communion with the divine through through its presence, becoming one with it, or its actual immanence.[1] Thus a considerable amount of effort went into establishing something akin to windows into the soul of the world.

Divination falls into two principal categories: by omen, and by oracle. The former is less formal, and the insight may be unsolicited. Oracular divination is a formal process. Again the basic principle of both approaches is that reality lies beyond the world of appearance, and is the place where the gods reside, their representations on earth notwithstanding. Here also is real knowledge and understanding, perfect in all respects. Gaining access to this realm, even for a short time and in a limited way, would enable real wisdom to be had here on earth.[2]

One of the characteristics of conceiving the world in teleological terms, with an ultimate reality at its apex, is that all facts in the mundane world have value – nothing is devoid of meaning. Meanings may be trivial and of little importance, but everything is conceivably significant, if only the meaning can be deduced and put into its proper context.[3]

Thus, we find a whole range of beliefs and practices surrounding the idea that the intent and purpose of the divine can be found in the world of everyday reality. The cleidon (literally ‘the key') was a Greek idea, that meaning might be heard in words spoken by a passerby, with no connection and no interest in the preoccupations of the person who overhears. The scattering of bones (using objects belonging to the dead) might reveal in the patterns in which they fall something of the intentions of the divine. Divination or augury by birds might also reveal important things about the world and its masters, and their intentions. These things might also foretell the future.

In Rome this interest in mundane things which might have some bearing on the mind of the gods or the future led the priests to maintain whitened boards, maintained in a public place, which contained notable information, some of which has been transmitted to us by the historian Livy. This might include information such as monstrous births, strange behaviour by fauna, grain prices, notices of earthquakes and floods, and so on.
In Babylonia records were kept of commodity prices, also for divinatory purposes.

Almost anything could be conceived as a way to understand the intentions of the divine. Ultimately the motions and relations of the planets and stars became part of this matrix of divinatory practice. We have records from Assyria which make it clear that the king, as representative of Ashur, king of the gods, who embraced the other gods, was concerned to express in the royal court, forms of behaviour consistent with the aspects of planetary behaviour.[4] The Assyrians also divined using the shadow of the

earth on the moon. Each of the quarters of the moon held a geographic significance for the Assyrians, so that the way the shadow moved across the moon (not always the same, due to the inclination of the orbit of the moon to the plane of the ecliptic, plus the effect of various nutational movements) defined the meaning for the state of Assyria. [5]

If we examine the Oracle of Delphi and the way it functioned, we can see that it fits within the same teleological model of the world. The questioner entered the oracle and was confronted by the Pythia, the priestess who delivered the responses, and an interpreter. The Pythia was seated on a tripod which sat above a rift in the earth from which gases emanated naturally. These were credited with being intoxicating, and an aid to the trance state in which the Pythia delivered her responses to questions. Trance by definition means that the individual is not acting in a normal way. The understanding of the questioner would be that the trancebound Pythia in some way possessed by the gods, who spoke through her.

The speech of the Pythia was wholly unintelligible to the inquirer, as might be expected by one who is conducting the speech of the gods. [6] Hence the need for the interpreter. The questions were in fact submitted to the oracle in advance, so there was time to prepare an intelligent and suitably ambiguous response to the inquiry. But the form of the engagement between the inquirer and the diviner was a connection with the gods. The interpreter divined the meaning of the Pythia, who divined the meaning of the gods. [7]

Again the same model underpins oracular divination as other forms of divination: it is possible for us to have contact and communication with the gods because there is something in us, for the majority of men and women mostly latent and not within our consciousness, which makes this communication possible. This is a consequence of the fact that we can have properties in common with the ground of Being, the home of the divine, such as perfection, completion, excellence, virtue, and so on. One would expect that the Pythia might be represented as in some way near at hand to the world of pure Being, through one of its metaphors. And indeed this is the case. The Pythia was always old, but was dressed in the clothes of a young girl. In Egyptian terms this would be understood as indicating her relationship to the horizon of existence, with its double doors of birth and death.[8]

Divination in all parts of the ancient world included that by the investigation of animal entrails. The usual animals for this included sheep, pigs, goats, and sometimes birds. The reasons for the use of these animals in particular are likely due to interesting and suggestive phenomena and properties of their viscera. There has been little interest shown in this level of detail in the practice of divination shown by modern scholars.[9] To my knowledge I know of only one modern experimental re-examination of the practice. This was conducted by Robert Temple as part of the research for his book 'Conversations with Eternity', and it is discussed again in his later book 'Netherworld'. He is conscious that this is strange territory:

'What was at the bottom of this strange practice? At a casual glance it seems total madness. Were the ancients out of their minds? Who would

want to plunge his hands into the steaming innards of a freshly killed animal, pull out some of its organs and study them with intense scrutiny? And more important, what possible connection could this disgusting activity be supposed to have with predicting the future? Was fate to be read in such a bloody place?

There is probably no better way to appreciate the chasm separating the ancient from the modern mind than by exploring this subject.'

Temple thinks there are perfectly sensible answers to be found however, and he is right. He is not looking to frame these answers within the technical language explored in *The Sacred History of Being* however, though he does argue for the ancient consensus view that aspects of the viscera reflect the world of the divine, in particular the Liver. He quotes Morris Jastrow to this effect (from his essay 'On the Liver as the Seat of the Soul'):

'The life or soul, as the seat of life, in the sacrificial animal, is, therefore, the divine element in the animal, and the god in accepting the animal, which is involved in the act of bringing it as an offering to the god, identifies himself with the animal – becomes, as it were, one with it. The life in the animal is a reflection of his own life, and since the fate of men rests with the gods, if one can succeed in entering into the mind of a god, and thus ascertain what he purposes to do, the key for the solution of the problem as to what the future has in store will have been found. The liver being the center of vitality – the seat of the mind, therefore as well as the emotions – it becomes in the case of the sacrificial animal, either directly

identical with the mind of the god who accepts the animal, or, at all events, a mirror in which the god's mind is reflected; or to use another figure, a watch regulated to be in sympathetic and perfect accord with a second watch. If, therefore, one can read the liver of the sacrificial animal, one enters, as it were, into the workshop of the divine will.' [10]

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Knowledge and Esoteric Doctrine

One of the problems with the understanding of intellectual systems which have an esoteric core is that, since the core is by definition something which is private and discreet, it is difficult to discover or intuit the nature of the core. In most cases, the esoteric element of doctrine is assumed by scholars to be something which is not associated in any technical sense with universal propositions, but is rather something peculiar to the cult or society in which the intellectual system has developed. This may often be the case. But the only way to be sure of this is to examine the possibility that the intellectual system under study draws for its substance and nature on propositions which are understood by those who share the doctrine to relate to universals.

Two things follow from this. The first is that, should the esoteric core of a doctrine which claims to model the world, actually be related to universal propositions, then it is possible, in theory at least, for us to disinter the esoteric core of doctrine by forensic logical analysis. This does not mean that the esoteric core can be lifted out of the body of doctrine as a discrete and self-sufficient entity – it is not likely to have a nature which would allow this. But it does mean that it is possible to open up the study of the esoteric nature of an intellectual system which has at root, a profound relation to universal propositions that we can understand, discuss, and question.

The second thing which follows is that we need to understand the nature and scope of universal propositions which can be held in the human mind – whether these are correct or otherwise – and know how these may be

understood to relate to various ideas, such as Being, extension, limit, completion, and so on.

The intellectual system therefore should be approached by means of a hypothesis. This hypothesis requires no evidential base for its application. The hypothesis is that there is an esoteric core present in an intellectual system which can be discovered by means of an analysis of the evidence, since the various elements of doctrine, imagery, literature, and so on, are ultimately related to a concern with universal propositions.

The experienced investigator will know at the outset whether or not aspects of the intellectual system in question are likely to be supported by an esoteric core based on a technical understanding of universal propositions, and how these may relate to particulars in the world.

If the esoteric core of the intellectual system is not based on a technical understanding of universal propositions, then the application of such a hypothesis will, in the course of time, reveal this. No other approach will produce a conclusive result. For our understanding of esoteric aspects of intellectual systems it is therefore essential that the application of such a hypothesis is considered before the nature and scope of the doctrine is assessed.

It has been part of the critical approach to ancient history hitherto that the human race was not, in any technical and intellectual sense, interested in universal propositions. Indeed, that the human race had no great expertise or interest in technical or even rhetorical abstraction before the middle of the 1st millennium BCE. Much of the evidence which is available to us, when subject to critical analysis, reveals the contrary to be the case. The absence of evidence for the importance of abstraction is an artefact of the critical approach of modern historians, who are grounded in the idea that

in ancient times, man dealt mainly in concrete notions and chose to reify complex aspects of his reality into concrete images.

This is not a scientific approach to the study of unknown or partially known intellectual systems. To assume that a phenomenal assemblage is not informed by an esoteric core, which is dependent for its nature on an understanding of universal propositions, is not a mode of analysis.

This is not to say that the reverse should be assumed. Rather that the apprehension of the nature of the unknown or partially known system should be subject to an inquiry which will provide answers as to whether or not the esoteric core is founded on universal propositions about the nature of reality.

The Sacred History of Being treated Plato as a priestly writer. The character and purpose of his work thus changes from a corpus exhibiting a purely academic interest in questions relating to universals, to a body of work which explores how man may function and understand in a world which is intimately connected with transcendent reality. His principal concern is the relationship between the knower and the known, the knowable and the unknowable. His interest in these questions parallels that of those involved in religious practice in Assyria, discussed later in *The Sacred History of Being*.

It would be impossible to formulate the religious practice familiar to Plato from a close study of his work. He is not concerned with the precise realisation of religious practice which may follow from his discussion, partly because this is irrelevant to him, and also to all who have a legitimate interest in religion. The variety of religious practice and phenomena which had been built up around the mediterranean from an initial interest in

universal propositions illustrates this, to the point where modern scholarship assumes for the most part that there is no substratum of connection between them at all, beyond a common origin in a vaguely defined religious impulse.

Being, Knowledge and Belief in Israel

'Something paradoxical and intriguing about human religion'

This chapter looks at the body of Mesopotamian ideas about the gods and the divine through the extensive commentary on these ideas present in the books of the Old Testament. It draws extensively on a study published in 1999, *Born in Heaven, Made on Earth*, edited by Michael Dick. The chapter also explores how Old Testament ideas about images were understood by the christian writer Tertullian, in the early second century of the common era.

> ….within the hierarchy of Mesopotamian ritual, the lengthy performance of washing the mouth of the temple statue is the most solemn, most sacred and most secret of rituals. This conclusion is reached from consideration of the special circumstances of the performance of the mis pi, the investment of time and resources, and the goal of the ritual. This ritual calls upon all the knowledge and spiritual know-how of the ritual specialists to transfer the deity from the spiritual world to the physical world. It requires the most expertise in ritual matters and accomplishes the epitome of ritual possibilities actualising the presence of the god in the temple. [11]

Though not the intention of *Born in Heaven, Made on Earth*, the book brings together much of the evidence for the case which argues that there was a complex and philosophical metaphysic beneath Mesopotamian religion.

In addition to an introduction by Dick, there are four main sections, covering prophetic parodies of making the cult image contained in biblical sources, authored by Dick; a chapter on the induction of the cult Image in ancient Mesopotamia (concerning the Mis Pi Ritual) co-authored with Christopher Walker; an essay by the Egyptologist David Lorton on the theology of cult statues in ancient Egypt for purposes of comparison, and finally an essay by Joanne Punzo Waghorne on the divine image in contemporary south India, where much of the practice known to the Assyrians and Babylonians is still in existence, though it is a practice which has been maligned in modern times.

The following discussion mainly concerns Michael Dick's contribution to the book, and principally his study of the prophetic parodies of the making of the cult image found in the Old Testament, which casts light on the intellectual currents of a remote world in which cult images possessed great power, prestige, and life, but were also the focus of theological disputation.

Dick has been interested in the detail surrounding cult statues since 1977, when he worked in this area for a year as a post-doctoral student at Johns Hopkins University, and it has remained a focus of his attention. His research as he says in his introduction to the volume, 'soon convinced me of the importance of the Mesopotamian Mis Pi ritual used to "give birth" to the god represented by the cult image'. He was introduced to Christopher Walker, who had written his Oxford University dissertation on the Mis Pi rite, by Dr. Jerrold Cooper of John Hopkins University. [12]

The introductory remarks on the cult Image are prefaced with a quotation from James Preston, which is worth repeating here:

> Through the study of icons and their construction we are able to perceive some of the most vital impulses underlying religious experience. Sacred images are products of the human imagination – they are constructed according to systematic rules, and then they are infused with sacrality and kept "alive" by highly controlled behaviours intended to retain the "spirit in matter". An analysis of this process of constructing sacred images, and the corollary process of the destruction, reveals to us something paradoxical and intriguing about human religion.[13]

Some aspects of religion are more religious than others, and the paradoxical aspects of human religion are, as well as intriguing, more religious than we are accustomed to accept.

The normal approach to the academic study of iconic imagery in religion is phenomenological and comparative. The phenomenological approach, as the term suggests, looks at the obvious and the external, and the relationships and patterns which can be discerned. Mainly this is a study of differences and similarities, but of course such a study can be much richer in nature, and a great deal can be discovered in this way. No-one however has been looking for a logical, philosophical and technical basis to the worship of images, either in the ancient past or, as in the case of cult statues in India, in contemporary human societies. This is because the scholarly model in which cult imagery is understood presumes that no such

basis is present, and the phenomenological approach does not provide suggestive evidence to the contrary.[14]

Immanence and Transcendence in Divine Images

Born in Heaven, Made on Earth treats of cult imagery as a form of concretization of the divine. Dick argues that

> attitudes (positive or negative) toward the concretization of the deity represented by the cult image reveal significant positions about the divine presence, about immanence and transcendence, about the very nature of the deity.[15]

While there have been many struggles in history between iconodules and iconoclasts, the seminal struggle is of course (as things have worked out) the one which is represented in the Old Testament.[16] The Israelites had come into very close contact with the Babylonian iconodule during the exile of the 6th century B.C.E., although it is unlikely to have been necessary for the Israelites to actually live among the Babylonians to understand their culture enough to rebel against its icons. Dick points out that many of the Bible's 'most strident' parodies of making an image of the god date from this period, and that even many of the Deuteronomistic legal prohibitions concerning the making of a cult image probably date from the post-Exilic period. The existence of these parodies within the Bible, which have received little attention outside scholarly circles, will probably come as a surprise to many. But that they are there suggests that the Israelites had at the very least a rudimentary awareness of Babylonian

ritual for the installation of cult images. And of course there were long-standing connections with Egypt, a culture which also had rituals for the making and installation of cult images.

Indeed, this problem (how can gods be made?) is still at the heart of our inability to understand the conceptual model which lies beneath the practice of idolatry in the ancient Near East, and, more remotely, beneath the veneration of cult images in modern India. Dick quotes an interesting statement by the Assyrian king Esarhaddon, from the early years of the seventh century B.C.E., in which the problem is directly acknowledged, but also in which Esarhaddon directly ties in the importance of cult images in Assyria with an intellectual outlook and conceptual model of the world which was later familiar to the Greeks. Esarhaddon says:

> Whose right is it, O great gods, to create gods and goddesses in a place where humans dare not trespass? Is it the right of deaf and blind human beings who are ignorant of themselves and remain in ignorance throughout their lives? The making of (images of) the gods and goddesses is your right, it is in your hands. [17]

The insertion of 'images of' in the last sentence is warranted only by the needs of our own perspective. The text literally says 'the making of the gods and goddesses is your right…' [18]

The point which is being made here however is that there is a strange circularity involved in the creation of the gods – a god must create a god,

and man cannot do this. So the craftsmen of Esarhaddon can only create gods (as we shall see) if they are *technically gods themselves at the moment of their creation and installation*, and that they can only function in this way if it is the will and command of the gods, mediated through the king, who is the representative of Assur, the chief of the gods on earth.

This perception of a problem in the creation of something quite 'other' is also reflected by the reverse scenario, found in Plato's *Timaeus*, in which god created a lesser creature - the Living Animal. But the Living Animal cannot be made directly by the god – it must be created by lesser gods, or as Plato would say, *demiourgoi*, otherwise there would be too much of the divine in the world. [19]

Esarhaddon expressly associates divinity with knowledge in this text, in that man is defined as 'deaf and blind', and human beings 'are ignorant of themselves and remain in ignorance throughout their lives.' It follows that the divine has the opposite characteristics, and that the artisans who build the statues must, at least temporarily in the cultic context, possess the attributes of the divine. Thus there must be a roughly parallel process in the creation of a temporary divinity in the artisan, and the installation of a divine statue.

We have the Babylonian ritual procedures for the installation of cult images, and a parallel rite from Egypt. But we do not have an equivalent from Greece. Early Christian literature 'often refers to similar Greek and Latin rites ('dedicatio')', but Dick suggests that it is not clear that such rites existed, citing studies by Barasch in 1992, [20] and Walter Burkert in 1985,

who says that “there are no magical rites to give life to the cult image as in Babylon”.[21] This is perhaps showing undue deference to the statements of these very eminent scholars. At this stage in this exploration, after the discussion of Plato’s writings on images, the likelihood would seem to be that the Greeks did have magical rites for the dedication and vivification of cult images – though unfortunately they have not survived. It is also likely that the statues were made divine on the basis of a similar (if not identical) notion of the nature of the divine, and that the magical rites bore a resemblance to one another in essential details. After all, both Plato and Esarhaddon equate the divine with knowledge, and ignorance with earthly existence: they are both looking to one thing,[22] the one thing which transcends all categories of earthly existence and the ultimate source of knowledge, and both (it would seem) believed that it may be accessed through the mediation of form (eidos).

A significant reference to the installation of statues in Christian literature is in the *Octavius of Minucius Felix*, where the importance of the will of the operative is isolated as critical. To Minucius Felix this is an argument against the credibility of the procedure, but in theurgic practice, the will of the operative to sacralise an object, or to work with the gods, is key to the process.

The Babylonian ritual procedures which prepared the statue of a god for functional use were known as ‘mouth-washing’ or ‘mouth-opening’ rituals.[23] We have texts which document both the ritual used, and many Babylonian and Sumerian incantations which were an essential part of the

ritual. The Egyptian ritual is known as 'performing the opening of the mouth in the workshop for the statue of the god'. [24]

Exile and after

Dick's essay on prophetic parodies of making the cult image emphasises that the parodies are mainly restricted to the Exilic and post-Exilic prophets of the 7th and 6th centuries B.C.E. His essay isolates and treats the three principal characteristics of the arguments against the making of cult images, which were also later discussed in Hellenistic times by Jewish, Christian and Pagan authors. Dick utilises an examination of the Israelite legal prohibition of cult images by Christoph Dohmen, which identifies altogether five types of texts dealing with these images. Of these, three are of principal importance – narratives which mention images, but in which the images are not important to that narrative; texts in the Deuteronomistic History or the Chronicler which relate to cult reform; and prophetic texts which focus their polemic against the making of cult images and their worship. These three types of argument are found in Deutero-Isaiah, Jeremiah, and late wisdom texts; and prophetic texts which mention cult images, but which are focussed on conflict with external religions and gods; and the legal prohibition of cult images. [25]

Dick's study concentrates on the third category of texts – the polemics against the making of cult images. He says that Dohmen's 'careful study of the evolution of the prohibitions against the cult image suggests that they were largely the product of 6th century redaction', and that the theological stresses of 586 B.C.E. assured both the triumph of Yahwistic monotheism

and of aniconic worship; Yahweh's cult had probably always been aniconic, but now there were no gods but Yahweh, so there was utterly no room for any cult image! The prophetic parodies respond to the same contemporary crises. Although they stem from different traditions, the legal and the prophetic understandings of a monotheistic and iconic Yahwism cope with the same catastrophe.[26]

Some terminology is borrowed from a recent discussion of aniconism by Mettinger, who uses the term 'aniconism' to refer to cults lacking iconic representation of the divinity, whether anthropomorphic or theriomorphic, 'serving as the dominant or central cultic symbol', whether or not the issue is an aniconic symbol or 'sacred emptiness'. Mettinger's term for the former is 'material aniconism', and the second he calls 'empty-space aniconism'. Dick points out that Mettinger also distinguishes 'de facto aniconism' and 'programmatic aniconism': the former refers to an indifference to the absence of images, and the latter refers to an active antagonism to images.[27] Parodies by the prophets of the making of cult images clearly fall into the second category.

Looking at the archaeological evidence, Dick suggests that 'the complexity of recent finds reminds us that the biblical prohibitions and the roughly contemporary prophetic parodies are the end result of a long development within Israelite religion and date from the last prophetic and Deuteronomistic phases of the Exilic and post-Exilic periods (7th-5th centuries B.C.E.).' He also suggests that recent biblical studies tend to indicate that Israel's monotheism represents 'the eventual triumph of a small "Yahweh alone" group over the exigencies of the Exile following the

destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E.' In other words, Dick is suggesting that a cultic group within Israel eventually determined the nature of Israel's pattern of belief. He reminds us that 'this victorious group played such a dominant role in editing the Hebrew Bible that their final triumph has been anachronistically regarded as both normative and universal during the entire preceding biblical period from 1200 to 600 B.C.E.'

This is quite extraordinary. If indeed the 'Yahweh alone' group did triumph after the destruction of Jerusalem, then we are left with very little idea of the nature of Hebrew beliefs before 600 B.C.E., except what we can infer from the biblical parodies and prohibitions. [28] Probably (says Dick) there were regional Yahwehs, with other deities in the pantheon, though the main deity was probably 'de facto aniconic from the beginning'. However, we have no evidence to explain why this Yahweh would be aniconic. But we can be sure there were other images within the cult of Yahweh, since the later prohibitions indicate this. Eventually the prohibitions excluded most of the earlier iconography.

Clues about the intellectual context of Divine Images in Israel

The prohibitions are very suggestive about the origin and original intellectual context of the cult of images. Dick cites the classic formulations of the prohibitions, Exodus 20:3-4, and Deuteronomy 5:7-8. The first of these runs:

> You shall not make for yourself an idol, and the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the

> water under the earth.

The second is almost identical. We might observe that the Exodus prohibition explicitly forbids the creation of images of what is in heaven above, but does not give any clue that it was ever conceivable to set up gods in heaven by means of the inauguration of cult statues. Dick says that the prohibitions recorded in Exodus and Deuteronomy seem to be 'the end of a long development and not its beginning', and so it might be that the prohibition concerns the practice and conceptual model of the time, rather than something long-established. It does however refer to images in the water under the earth, which recalls the very old Mesopotamian image of Ea/Enki in his shrine in the sea, in the sweet waters of the apsu.

The model of the evolution of aniconism in Israel used by Dick is based on that constructed by Christoph Dohmen. Dohmen's evolutionary model starts with a reconstruction of Exodus 20: 23b and 24a:

> Gods of silver and gods of gold you shall not make for yourself; an altar of earth you shall make for me.

This commandment does not forbid image worship, but rather simply the 'making' of gods of gold and silver. Dick says the passage forbids 'the 'making' of gold and silver statues', but, once again, the original does not say 'images of gods of silver and gods of gold'. The making of *gods* is exactly what is referred to. Dohmen's interpretation of the commandment is: 'rather than cult images let there be sacrifices and blood rites'. Whether or not we are looking at this phenomenon from the point of view of a cultural evolution or as a theological dispute between factions, both of

which privilege the aniconic nature of Yahweh, this commandment served to direct the Israelites away from notions of contact with the divine by means of images, and to substitute contact via ritual action rather than the worship of cult statues.

A lot of ink has been expended over the years on this crucial development in the history of the Israelites. Dick quotes Dietrich and Loretz's summary of several traditional reasons for an aniconic religious culture in Israel. They argue that the culture is

> ….an expression of primitive aversion to images, a particular preference of the Israelites for "hearing" (over "seeing"), a peculiarly Israelite spirituality in its concept of the deity, the Israelite sense of awe before the divinity, Yahweh's jealousy of the Caananite gods, the prohibition against other gods, cultural poverty resulting from the desert experience, animosity towards luxury items among prophetic-Levitical circles, the dependence of the Yahwistic religion on the aniconic worship of an early Semitic main god.

Quite why there should be a 'primitive' aversion to images is not explained. Likewise, there is no real basis for arguing a 'a peculiarly Israelite spirituality', since that explains nothing. 'Awe' is not a response confined to aniconic divinity, and to qualify it as an 'Israelite sense of awe' simply implies that they responded differently to everyone else. The other reasons given for the Israelite struggle with cult images are equally unhelpful.

However, there is another 'related but distinct' argument for aniconism in Israel, suggested by the scholar Ronald Hendel in 1988. Hendel documented the 'close connection between the royal iconography and the portrayal of such main Canaanite deities as El.' He suggests that, since in the ancient Near East 'the earthly king, who was at times described as the "image/statue" of the god, was the embodiment of the main god', it is possible that 'ancient Israel had such a deep hostility toward the institution of the monarchy that it could consequently have adopted an aniconic representation of its god to reflect that he had no royal counterpart.' [29]

This is a much more persuasive suggestion, and hostility of this sort was clearly part of the process by which Israel moved towards an aniconic mode of religion, shorn of all religious imagery. But this evolutionary model of the development of an aniconic Yahweh seems to imply an iconic precursor (i.e., a symbol of kingship), which is not supported by the archaeological and textual evidence. If there is no iconic precursor, it is difficult to see this process as evolutionary.

In the time of the Early Monarchy it seems that the Ark of the Covenant symbolised the presence of God, and Dick argues that it was essentially aniconic, though it is clearly a cult image. The Ark was moved to Jerusalem, [30] in the discussion of the construction of the Temple [31] it was placed in the normal location of the main cult image. Later texts however place the Ark in a position subordinate to that of the Cherubim (often described in conjunction with the Ark), [32] and indeed the Cherubim were understood to represent the throne of Yahweh. Dick suggests that

> Solomon made a compromise by combining the Cherub-throne and the empty throne represented by the Ark. In which case, at this period it appears there was no general prohibition against images – other symbols in the cult, such as the bronze serpent (attributed to Moses) and Jeroboam's bull, were retained.

Dick points out that when Jeroboam 'wished to establish a rival for the Jerusalem Temple, he set up the bull postament in Bethel, and it probably served like the Jerusalem Cherubim as part of the throne for the invisible Yahweh'.

Dick identifies the prophet Hosea as a critical player at an important stage of Israel's development of aniconism. Hosea [middle of the 8th century] stood against syncretism, and for the exclusive worship of Yahweh, to the exclusion of all other gods. At Hos. 13:4 there are the lines:

> And I am Yahweh your God from the land of Egypt; and you shall not know any gods besides me, and there is no saviour but me.

Here there is no polemic against cult images as are found in later periods, but his criticism of 'idols' 'represents an important step in that direction'. From the time of Hosea onwards, the foreign gods of other nations were 'idols'.

The 8th and 7th centuries B.C.E. were decisive for the emergence of the proscribers of images. Dick suggests that the 'seductiveness of Assyrian religion created a further crisis in the South.' [33] The cultic reforms of

Hezekiah and the centralization of the cult under Josiah, led to the prohibition of images. Among the reforms of Hezekiah was the expulsion of the bronze serpent. [34] This action may have been influenced by the fact that the serpent played a role in Assyrian religion. However, there does not seem to have been in place a general antipathy to images even as late as the 7th century. According to Dick, 'some scholars argue on the basis of seals from the 7th century, which generally prefer inscriptions to images, that there was already a commandment against images.' However, the son of Hezekiah, Mannasseh, reversed his father's reforms, and foreign cults were reintroduced. Dick suggests that the Deuteronomic movement may have arisen in response to the reintroduction of syncretism in religion.

Within the Deuteronomistic theology, the view of Hosea about the ambivalence of images developed into the demand that every image or cult object that could point toward another god 'was to be rejected'. Dick argues that the reform of Josiah [35] had a Deuteronomist agenda, and that the destruction of the Asherahs and Massebahs was not the result of a prohibition of images, but rather out of the demand for an exclusive Yahwistic religion. There are no allusions to a prohibition of images in the accounts of Josiah's reform, and according to Dohmen, the prohibition at Deuteronomy 5:8 – 'You shall not make for yourself an image' – probably stems from the later post-exilic Deuteronomistic movement. Dick reminds us that the earliest form of the prohibition against images was not a broad prohibition against all religious representational art, but only against cult images, quoting the text at Leviticus 26:1 –

> You shall not make for yourselves idols, and cult images and massebah you shall not set up for yourselves, and a worked stone you shall not place in your land to bow down to it because I am Yahweh your God.

Thus, the prohibition of images arose originally as a special instance of the commandment against other gods, but the prohibition of images became dominant. Leviticus 26:1 goes further than the dismissal of foreign gods as 'idols' found in 19:4 by identifying these gods with their images, and prohibiting their making. [36] The prohibition of the making of cult images thus subordinates the commandment against foreign gods, and emphasises the focus on cult images by means of the specification of the objects meant – cut stone; stone; cult image; and massebah.

The prohibition is in close proximity to the Holiness code found in Leviticus 19-26, which I think is of some significance. The formula found at Leviticus 19:2, "you shall be holy because I Yahweh your God am holy", implies that worship of the divine Yahweh may confer holiness on earthly individuals: a fact of some relevance to the business of the creation of divine images within religious cult. [37]

The prohibition was expanded to all representation during the late Exilic period. Deuteronomy 4: 16-25 reveals this latest stage in the development of the prohibition:

> Lest you worship and make for yourselves a cult image, a representation of any beast on the earth, a representation of any

> winged bird in the heavens, a representation of anything that crawls on the land, a representation of any fish which is in the waters under the earth….. Lest you forget the covenant of Yahweh your God which he made with you and make for yourselves a cult image, the form of anything…. and bow down, and you make a cult image, the form of anything.

The 'form of anything' (it has been suggested) is perhaps an editorial expansion to eliminate any ambiguity about the commandment. [38] Or, perhaps, just possibly, it represents the core of the objection, peeking out, giving us a clue as to the real basis of the objection to cult images.

In any case, the original prohibition was expanded to list various types of likeness, and then extended to cover all types of cult objects, both anthropomorphic and zoomorphic, as well as symbols and posts, etc.

Summarising this discussion, as we have seen, there is no evidence that there ever was a physical representation of Yahweh in Israel – it seems as though Yahweh was never represented as a cult image. The concept of Yahweh seems according to the evidence we currently have to have always transcended the idea of physical representation. It is clear also that artistic representation and even cult images were not prohibited during the pre-Exilic period, and some survived into the post-Exilic period. The cult images which did exist may well have had some important religious functions in relation to Yahweh, and when these cult images were prohibited, it would be necessary to find some alternative way to address these functions. This difficulty was addressed by the legitimising of the use of an altar of earth.

The conventional model argues for an evolutionary development of the cult of Yahweh, in which the deity is progressively isolated from religious iconography and cult images, whether or not Yahweh himself was at any time represented by an image. Eventually of course, not only was all imagery suppressed, but worship (and also the practice of sacrifice) was later centralised in a single cult centre based in the temple at Jerusalem.

Thus the trajectory of the cult was to circumscribe more and more the liberty of the Israelites to engage with their god. Prophecy was forbidden, and superseded by priestly interpretation of the law. Together with the removal of the license to worship and sacrifice at altars of earth, this small caste of iconoclasts managed to remove entirely the personal aspects of the Israelite religion from its adherents. Eventually sacrifice also was abandoned, after the destruction of the temple.

This picture of this development indicates that the adherents of the cult of the aniconic Yahweh were engaged in extending the prohibition of the cult image to all images associated with their religion. That is to say, that in addition to the necessity of avoiding the representation of Yahweh, it became ultimately desirable for them to destroy all the religious images of Israel. This suggests very strongly that, unless they were possessed by some kind of mania which had little to do with their religion, it was the idea of images which was close to the heart of the problem, not simply the representation of the god of the Israelites.

So it might not be the case that the prohibition against the cult image was aimed principally at dissociating the Israelite religion from echoes of the logic of Mesopotamian religion, in which the king was seen as an image of the supreme deity. Nor is it likely to be the result of a 'cultural poverty' produced by a desert existence – the objection to imagery was clearly much more fundamental than that. So fundamental in fact, that, ultimately, it gave rise to proscriptions reaching beyond the removal of images. In other words, the target of the iconoclasts was something even more fundamental than the danger which inhered in the Israelites response to images, though part of the same complex of religious ideas.

Idolatry and Iniquity

What could this great danger be? We need to move forward in time by several hundred years, and to another part of the world, in order to find a wider view of the supposed iniquity of idolatry. The clearest existing discussion of the danger of idolatry is found in one of the works of the first of the Christian theologians, Tertullian, who lived in Rome, and who wrote around 200 A.D, some seven hundred years after the codification of Hebrew scripture. He is not popular with modern Christian scholars, partly because there is a whiff of the extremist in his writing, which nevertheless has intelligence, wit, and clarity. He is unrelenting about the implications of scripture for the limitations of the engagement of Christians with the world - limitations which the urbane modern Christian has left far behind.

He wrote a short book *On Idolatry* [39] which survives, which tells us a great deal about the underlying objections to idolatry in the ancient world. He

suggests that ‘the principal crime of the human race, the highest guilt charged upon the world, the whole procuring cause of judgment, is idolatry’. This is because, apparently, all crimes can be understood as aspects of idolatry. Tertullian acknowledges that ‘each single fault retains its own proper feature, …[and] it is destined to judgement under its own proper name’…. yet he says that: ‘it is marked off under the general account of idolatry’.

Tertullian argues that in former times there were no idols, and that temples and shrines stood empty. Yet even at that time idolatry was practised ‘not under that name, but in that function’. This is because it can be practised outside a temple, and without an idol. He argues that ‘every art which in any way produces an idol instantly became a fount of idolatry…’ since:

> it makes no difference whether a moulder cast, or a carver grave, or an embroiderer weave the idol, because neither is it a question of material, whether an idol be formed of gypsum, or of colors, or of stone, or of bronze, or of silver, or of thread.. For since even without an idol idolatry is committed, when the idol is there it makes no difference of what kind it be, of what material, or what shape….

There is not much room for the excuses of the sinner if idolatry is a broader crime than that of making or worshipping idols! But we have here a discussion of a core objection to the cult image, and the model of reality in which the crime of idolatry can reach beyond the use of idols, which

may have underpinned the Israelite struggle with the presence of cult images in their religious life.

He argues that the idolater is a murderer, an adulterer, and a fornicator. A murderer, because his idolatry murders not a stranger or a personal enemy, but his own self, through the snares of his own error. His weapon is the offence done to God, and the number of blows are as many as his idolatries. He is an adulterer and a fornicator,

> for he who serves false gods is doubtless an adulterer of truth, because all falsehood is adultery. So, too, he is sunk in fornication. For who that is a fellow-worker with unclean spirits, does not stalk in general pollution and fornication? And thus it is that the Holy Scriptures use the designation of fornication in their upbraiding of idolatry.

In exploring the intellectual background of idolatry, Tertullian explicitly refers to the terminology for images found in Plato [eidos, signifying 'form', and eidolon for 'image']. [40] He suggests there is a cognate pattern of meaning in his own language (Latin) which means that he regards an idol as a 'formling'. He says that 'every form or formling… claims to be called an idol'.

He reminds us that the prophet Enoch had predicted that:

> the demons, and the spirits of the angelic apostates, would turn into idolatry all the elements, all the garniture of the universe, all things contained in the heaven, in the sea, in the earth, that they might be consecrated as God, in opposition to God…. The images of those things are idols, the consecration of the images is idolatry…. Ye who serve stones, and ye who make images of gold, and silver, and wood, and stones and clay, and serve phantoms, and demons, and spirits… and all errors not according to knowledge, shall find no help from them.

The reference to 'errors not according to knowledge' makes it clear that we are here essentially within a quasi-Platonic model of the world in which only apprehension of the ultimate form constitutes real knowledge – everything else represents illusion and error. And Tertullian has no difficulty in placing this interpretative scheme beneath the world view of the prophets and lawgivers of the Israelites who lived before Plato.[41]

The standard scholarly response to this would be to argue that Tertullian is retrojecting into antiquity a theological reading where no such understanding of the world existed. Yet without such a theology being present in the 8th and 7th centuries, we have little to explain the nature of the epochal religious struggles in the development of the religion of the Israelites. The phenomenological analysis of the history of religion in Israel leaves us with a struggle whose motive is essentially unfathomable, and which leaves evidential details unexplained.

So if, like Tertullian, we infer a philosophically based theology beneath the outward form of the religious history of the Israelites and their struggle with idolatry, how well does it fit? Is it broken as a frame, or does it infuse the evidence with life?

First, the question of the aniconic nature of Yahweh ceases to be a difficulty. It is aniconic because the definition of the deity places it beyond all imaging. This it has in common with Plato's definition of the Good: as we found in the *Sophist*, the form of forms has no colour, shape – or indeed form. In this the god of the Israelites has the same nature and properties as the transcendent divine among the Assyrians, their principal antagonist to the north-east.

In the early part of the 1st millennium B.C.E., this aniconic divinity held principal place in a cultural context which sanctioned the use of cult images. The use of cult images in Israel might have been closely analogous with the practice in Assyria.

If these images (for example) served as the elements in a chain of images leading to the contemplation of Yahweh (as Plato would say, 'looking to one thing'; a thing transcendent of all appearance), the removal of the images would necessitate the creation of a new way of worshipping Yahweh, and an alternative way of focussing the minds of the worshippers on the nature and power of the god. The alternative suggested at Exodus 20: 23-24, as already noted, is the altar of earth. In other words, sacrifice to Yahweh was the substitute form of engagement with the god.

There are several possible motives, stemming from the centrality of an aniconic divinity representing Being itself, for the proscription and removal of the images (it is unlikely that the reasons were simple): it could be that it was decided that the role of images in the cult of Yahweh ought to be reduced on the grounds that the proper focus of attention and worship ought to be the unchanging and unfathomable nature of Yahweh. Or, since the nature of Yahweh is to be beyond representation to the ultimate degree, it might have been argued that any representation in a cultic context would offer the danger of misleading the adherents of the cult. Another possibility is that representations within the cult involving the use of form to recall that which is utterly without form, which ought to be represented as a paradoxical phenomenon, might instead be represented as a contradictory practice, and as a species of error. In which case, the proper course of action would be to remove all images from the cult.

Another possible scenario is that, given the former importance of the images to the functionality of the cult, those members who understood the point of having images in the cult of an aniconic deity, might have found themselves arguing the undesirability of images in public, but attempting to continue the cultic procedures and the worship of images in private.

It is one thing for a religion to have two views of its icons, however - one for the initiated priesthood, and another for the ignorant and ill-educated - but another altogether to try to remove cult images from all public view and use, yet keep them for private priestly worship. To have attempted this

would very quickly have exposed the priesthood to charges of heresy and hypocrisy, and would have threatened the life of the cult. [42]

The likeliest explanation is that some faction of the cult of Yahweh (the one which eventually triumphed) came to believe that images were unacceptable in a cult which had as its focus an aniconic deity. Like statues themselves, which live and think, yet do not move, there was a paradoxical element in a religion which venerated a divinity which transcended form, and yet surrounded it in ritual which utilised a number of images. Unlike the Assyrian religion, the Israelites do not seem to have had a complex of myths around the idea of a trickster god, emphasising that one of the ways in which the transcendent nature of the divinity expresses itself is through actions and judgement which do not make sense to mortals. [43]

My own view is that the Israelites, for whatever reason, lost their understanding of Yahweh as a philosophically based concept, and ditched all cult images, without a consensus understanding of the cultic consequences of this action. The radical faction perceived only contradiction, not paradox, in the proximity of an aniconic divinity, and cult images.

The essential aniconic nature of Yahweh would be (on the face of things) defended by this development, but at the cost of demolishing a significant part of the supporting theology and the cultural model of Yahweh, in that a cult originally using images and forms to point to an aniconic deity would lose its former means of contact and continuity with that deity. The substitution of sacrifice for this continuity would break the connection

between the world of appearances and the divinity, and images no longer would be understood as a way of recalling the divinity and its role in the world.[44]

If this interpretation is broadly correct, what we are looking at is not so much an evolutionary process, but a revolutionary one, which has had profound and long-lasting consequences

Monotheism or Polytheism?

Monotheism in Israel is nearly always read in the context of either a religious revelation or a dawning understanding that there is only one God. And that the revelation or the realization of the uniqueness of God represents some kind of cultural and intellectual triumph over the polytheism which prevailed elsewhere (and probably in Israel too, earlier in the 1st millennium BCE).

That is one way to tell the story. We tell it like that because the three major Abrahamic religions are all monotheistic, and are very uncomfortable with the idea of polytheism, which, without knowing too much about its nature or history, they regard as a species of error which afflicted the cultures which preceded their existence.

Polytheism from this point of view represents a failure of the purely human intellect to understand the nature of the divine. Polytheism is therefore a barbarous phenomenon, and is irretrievably associated with all that is

coarse and unintelligible in antiquity, along with the ritual actions which have been jettisoned along the way, such as the sacrifice of animals and men, divination by entrails and the liver, augury by birds, the use of oracles, sacred prostitution, and so on. Even as a child I caught the rank smell of polytheism and its association with all other sins. Polytheism was close to damnation itself.

The evidence however, can be read another way.

In this essay I've looked at a variety of passages which refer to polytheism and the worship of other gods in several of the books of the Bible. Some of these can be interpreted as referring to experience of worship in early Israel, but other passages clearly reflect the experience of Babylonian religion and practice during the time of the exile. And we now know some interesting things about the scope and function of polytheism in Mesopotamia which make it possible for us to change our perspective on religious developments in Israel. We now have some notion of what kind of ideas were in circulation in Israel after the exile. And these ideas, perhaps borrowed from Mesopotamian sources, if they were not already present as part of the cultural milieu of Israel, were quite sophisticated.

The polytheism of Mesopotamia was not, as might be imagined, a loose array of different cults, without essential connection. This is not to dispute the long-accepted argument that the ultimate origins of the individual cults were likely to be local and tribal for the most part, and that their importance changed over time. But Mesopotamian polytheism in the 2nd and 1st millennia BCE, is not what it has seemed to be. The clue as to

what is going on is in the properties and attributes of their gods, not their names. These can be detached and transferred to other deities, or shared, which process we can detect at work in the liturgy of the Babylonian New Year Festival, *Enuma Elish*.

These processes have been explored in some of the chapters of *The Sacred History of Being.* There are two main points made in this essay however, which are relevant to our understanding of how divinity was understood in Israel during the time of its existence in the 1st millennium. The first is that there is rational argument about the nature of the divine and its worship going on, and the second is that the history of this argument has been garbled and reframed by later scholars who either did not fully understand the nature and scope of the argument, or otherwise chose not to understand it, for largely political reasons.

It is possible to read the emergence of monotheism in Israel as a prolonged *theological and philosophical controversy*, in which the nature of a deity without form, colour, and shape, similar in nature to 'the one thing' that we should look to, as referenced by Plato, is debated. This debate was mired in the complex politics of the time, with the overbearing presence and interference of Israel's neighbour to the north east, Assyria. And so there was also a political aspect to the debate, which helps to explain some of the decisions that were made concerning representation and ritual practice, and sometimes their reversal or modification, which we learn of in a number of the books of the Old Testament. The treatment of images in the history of Israel (as we know it) is complex and often confusing, which may reflect the confusions present in Israel at the time.

We should consider the possibility that the phenomenal polytheism of the Mesopotamian states of Assyria and Babylonia enshrined *a profound and noumenal monotheism*, in that it had at its very core the idea that it was focused on 'looking to the one thing', which was also, as in Greece, understood as without shape, colour or form, and that this focus can be traced back at least as far as the middle of the 2nd millennium BCE. That is what the god Aššur actually represented, even when given shape and form. * [45]

This may always have been an idea of the divine present in the religion of Israel, or it may have been borrowed from Mesopotamian sources. However, the violent struggle in Israel and the eventual triumph of the 'Yahweh alone' group, which compiled the documents in the Old Testament, mean that *we do not know* with any certainty the nature of religion in Israel during the first half of the 1st millennium BCE.

The documents - as we have them - tell us that there were other gods in Israel, both Canaanite and foreign, and that there were prohibitions issued against their worship. These prohibitions eventually took in religious iconography and religious objects, and later images of any kind. In the end, private religious practice was discouraged, save with a simple altar of earth. The final stage was the removal of private worship of Yahweh altogether, and communion with the god of Israel was centralised in the Temple at Jerusalem.

In Greece and Mesopotamia divine images functioned as a part of a complex system, a chain of images of Being, to enable intellectual access to the most difficult of all images which might be apprehended by man or god: the one true thing, which is the nature of reality itself, and the source of all knowledge.

Over time, the polytheistic show was entirely removed in Israel. The monotheism which emerged in Israel was necessarily no longer about access to knowledge of the divine and its apprehension - a mental discipline - but about belief.

The Concept of the Plenum in Babylon

The Babylonian Creation was twofold. The first creation was the product of a plenum, and describes a hail of impossible animals tumbling out of it, with features and limbs which were interchangeable, resulting in some creatures which were utterly fantastic. The creation is from a plenum, because all the characteristics of living creatures are already present, though the way these characteristics are distributed is the stuff of nightmares. This first creation was without reason and rational order, and chaotic.

We are also told that the creatures shared each other's features. This is another characteristic of a plenum. All things can pass into everything else. Nothing is fixed. The initial state of the world does not have fixity of any sort.

Were the gods already present? Some of them were, at least in a sense. The Babylonians had the idea that they could call gods into existence, by naming and describing them, and performing ritual which set them up in the Babylonian Heaven.

There is a curious aspect to the Babylonian creation story, in that the god Marduk, who became the head of the pantheon of Gods, and was the defining power for the organisation of the second creation, was said to have been 'held prisoner' during the time of the first creation. This imprisonment can be understood in at least two ways. First of all, if Marduk had been active at the time of the first creation, why would he have allowed its irrational nature? Therefore, it was decided that the explanation for his inaction was that he was not free to act. A second interpretation of his imprisonment may be that the initial irrational

creation was inevitable, and had to happen before it was possible to establish good order. Something about the first creation resulted in his release and his presence.

In either case, the idea of the plenum is indicated, and in its most pure form.

The gods in the Babylonian creation story are indicative of abstract powers and properties, and some of them have reality before the advent of the second creation. Anshar, is King of Heaven for example (in fact he has no name as such, since An Shar is the description 'King of Heaven'. It is important to know what he is). The Babylonian Heaven is clearly the underlying plenum, where all things are present as potencies, so Anshar is the abstraction of the potency of the plenum. In the complex narrative of the liturgy for the New Year Festival, Anshar is father to Marduk, but Marduk is also presented as the equal of Anshar. In fact, as Anshar himself. Marduk is also the equal of other important gods representing abstract ideas in the earliest times of the creation.

Description of these early gods natures, associations, and actions is a way for the Babylonians to discuss and understand the nature of the plenum from which the gods emerged. What Marduk eventually became as head of the Babylonian pantheon, described in the passage in the liturgy known as 'The Fifty Names of Marduk', is the totality of the powers of Anshar and the other gods, and therefore signifies that Marduk embodies the character of the underlying pleroma.

After Marduk established control, and began to call the other gods into existence, these later gods now represent something like a human understanding of the world, and how it might be made. The gods represent in abstract form the good things in human life and social

organisation. Each god is represented as an aspect of Marduk and his exemplification of good kingship. Thus, the gods names and descriptions indicate that he supplies places of refuge for man, the cultivation of crops, the provision of quays and landings for trade, the maintenance of good order in the world, and so on.

Sometimes the gods are brought into being as twins, with slightly different names. This can indicate a division between an abstract concept and a state. Marc Van De Mieroop, in his *book Philosophy Before the Greeks* (2015), gives an example of a pair of these from a genealogy of divine names, one of which means ‘mud’ and the other means ‘muddy’.

Pleroma, Cosmos, and Physical Existence

There isn't much we can say about the initial state of physical reality at a notional time of its emergence, if the various parameters of what can be said of it don't have any existence. That's the problem physics has when it is looking for causes and mechanisms.

However, it is possible to talk about the initial state of reality in terms of logical argument, which is how it was done in antiquity. They were familiar with talking about reality in terms of extreme states: does it exist? What is it? Is it one or two? If it is two is reality other than itself? Is reality complete in itself? Is physical existence a copy based on the pattern of reality itself? If it is a copy, has the nature of reality itself been compromised?

Whatever the initial conditions might have been, we can say that those conditions are at the edge of physical existence. Which is not to suggest that they actually occupy some kind of space at the edge of physical existence. Just that, since the initial conditions don't participate in the conditions of our physical existence (extension, vectors, time, etc), then these conditions will, to us, appear to be something which we can find at the extremes of physical existence.

This is the root of the idea of the telos. It is about beginnings and endings – how things start and finish. When what is ultimately real is considered in

this way, it is susceptible to logical analysis, and an idea of a prime mover beyond the properties of the telos itself is not required.

A discussion of this conception of the telos should be untarnished by the general deprecation of teleological argument in any kind of scientific analysis. We aren't looking for purpose. But we are looking for the beginning, and how things might have unfolded from that beginning. The concept of the telos as a plenum, a pleroma undefined by the kind of parameters we find in our physical existence, as opposed to the idea that physical existence just appeared *ex nihilo*, can be discussed. Nothing as absence is very hard to discuss, except in the context of its opposite. In fact, it cannot reasonably be conceived without that context.

The discussion of Aristotle (in the chapter: 'Logical Modality in Classical Athens') places his laws of thought into a wider context. The laws represent tools in the Greek dialectical armoury. So do the techniques used by Plato. But they are quite different and produce different kinds of argument and result in different conclusions. They belong to the same armoury (a discussion for another time). It is possible to understand some things with Plato's approach which would not be possible with a rigorous application of Aristotle's laws of thought. It isn't the case that one logical approach is correct, and the other not. But they are appropriate to different contexts.

A plenum can be understood as identical with itself, and so, in that sense, can be thought of as consistent with the first of the laws of thought. But its properties, as understood from the point of view of physical reality, cannot

be self-consistent, since it is beyond definition in physical terms. So, the plenum must have a paradoxical aspect (literally meaning it is beyond human understanding), and therefore must breach the other two laws of thought (it can be one thing or its opposite; and it may also be neither one thing or its opposite).

There are several ways an argument about an initial and ever-present plenum can be taken forward. One is to take the view that physical reality represents a partial view of the plenum. Or can be understood as an assemblage of partial views of the plenum. It contains consistencies and regularities, but at a granular level (particularly), it behaves with apparent inconsistency, being best understood in terms of probability. That is how the plenum is, or at least the best way it can be understood by us. It isn't one thing or the other. But occasionally its granularity looks like one thing or the other. And sometimes both at the same time. We can describe what is going on in terms of probabilities, which is how physics handles it, but it is not understood except in terms of mathematical description. The idea of the plenum, as established through a purely logical analysis, provides insight into how the universe is actually operating.

It could be argued that physical reality behaves as it does at the quantum level because, for all practical purposes, the plenum *has no size*. So, at the quantum level, we are looking more closely at the nature of the plenum as it is, or rather as it must, on account of its nature, look to us.

Quantum entanglement might have a similar basis, on the ground that what is happening is actually happening in the plenum, rather than in

physical space. Despite it having no size, it must necessarily be (in a sense) distributed throughout space and time.

The Divine and the Limit

This is an extract from a document (not a chapter in *The Sacred History of Being*) which was put together as part of a project to understand the role and function of the threshold and the boundary in Mesopotamia in general, and Assyria in particular. The purpose of this part of the document was to explore parallel cultural concerns with thresholds and boundaries elsewhere in the ANE, and also around the Mediterranean. The extract concerns ancient Rome.

In exploring these details, over a long period and in some depth, it is hard not to have the disturbing feeling that often, much of what we have understood to be the 'religion' of a culture, isn't anything of the sort, but a form of public show, which actually disguises what is regarded as important. As noted below, at sacrifices, the name of Janus was mentioned before that of Jupiter. Jupiter is supposed to be the supreme god of the Romans! There are strong connections between the public faces of the gods and the underlying ideas concerning reality of course, but often they aren't spelled out, or are otherwise glossed in a manner which misdirects those who do not belong to the priestly class.

I'm not referring to the traditional distinction that academics make between theology as the core of a religion, and the exoteric show as its external expression. These details are esoteric in nature, and exist below the surface level of whatever theology can be discovered. In Assyria, the role of the Sacred Tree is a perfect example. Its image is everywhere, but there is no formal discussion of it anywhere which survives. It plays a role

in shaping their theology we know, but it seems that, like the Kabbalah for many centuries, its significance and use was confined to oral communication and discussion.

A short study of the significance of the threshold in Mesopotamia and Assyria will be published separately. The role and function of the Assyrian Sacred Tree is extensively discussed in *The Sacred History of Being*.

***

...The Romans also had a tradition of veneration of the boundaries and limits of things. Oskar Seyffert describes the god Janus as 'A god peculiar to the Italians, with no corresponding divinity among the Greeks'. However, the lack of a corresponding divinity does not mean the importance of limits and boundaries to their patterns of belief was unknown to the Greeks. Seyffert continues that 'even the ancients were by no means clear as to his special significance; he was, however, regarded as one of the oldest, holiest, and most exalted of gods'.

Of course, if the special significance of Janus was close to the heart of Roman religion, an absence of discussion might, rather than signifying a lack of clarity about his special significance, mean quite the opposite, and that the written tradition is quite misleading as to the Roman understanding of Janus, at least within the priestly community.

'In Rome the king, and in later times the rex sacrōrum, sacrificed to him'.

[46] 'At every sacrifice, he was remembered first; in every prayer, he was the first invoked, being mentioned even before Jupiter'. Which is indication of high status. If we recall the remarks of Pythagoras on what comes first and why, we can see that the significance of Janus is extremely important indeed. This is further emphasised by the fact that 'in the songs of the Salii ('jumpers' or dancers) he was called the good creator, and the god of gods; he is elsewhere named the oldest of the gods and the beginning of all things' . [47] The Salii were an old Italian college of priests of Mars, said to have been originally introduced at Rome by Numa Pompilius, the legendary 2nd king of Rome. He was said to be a native of Cures in the Sabine country, and was elected king a year after the death of Romulus.

William Smith says that 'he was renowned for his wisdom and piety; and it was generally believed that he derived his knowledge from Pythagoras'. [48] Given that the foundation of Rome is traditionally 753 B.C.E., this is impossible, since Numa and Pythagoras would have been two centuries apart. However, the fact that later the institutions of Numa were associated with Pythagorean influence suggests that there was a perception of a relationship between the doctrines of Pythagoras and the foundation of Roman religion. Smith continues: '…he devoted his chief care to the establishment of religion among his rude subjects', and to giving them appropriate forms of worship. He was instructed by the Camena Egeria (Aegeria), one of the twelve nymphs in Roman mythology. Numa later dedicated the grove in which he had his interviews with the goddess, in which a well gushed forth from a dark recess, to the Camenae. [49]

Seyffert continues regarding Janus: 'It would appear that originally he was a god of the light and of the sun, who opened the gates of heaven on going forth in the morning and closed them on returning at evening'. Rather, Janus, being the divinity associated with boundaries, is associated with gates, crossings, risings and settings, beginnings and endings, and the daily movement of the sun is the most important visible instance of beginnings and endings. In course of time (Seyffert suggests) 'he became the god of all going out and coming in, to whom all places of entrance and passage, *all doors and gates were holy*' [my italics]. Seyffert, writing in the late 19th century, is assuming an evolution of the nature of the god. He continues:

> In Rome all doors and covered passages were suggestive of his name. The former were called ianuae; over the latter, the arches which spanned the streets were called iani

which Seyffert suggests, 'is a term perhaps symbolical of the vault of heaven'.[50] Many of these were expressly dedicated to him, especially those 'which were situated in markets and frequented streets, or at crossroads'. In the case of crossroads, Seyffert tells us that 'they were adorned with his image, and the double arch became a temple with two doors, or the two double arches a temple with four'. The way Janus was generally represented was 'as a porter with a staff and a key in his hands, and with two bearded faces placed back to back and looking in opposite directions.'

Further, he is also the god of entrance into a new division of time, and was therefore saluted every morning as the god of the breaking day (pater matutinus); the beginnings of all the months (the calends) were sacred to

him, as well as to Juno; and, among the months, the first of the natural year, which derived from him Ianuarius. For sacrifices on the calends twelve altars were dedicated to him; his chief festival, however, was the 1st of January, especially as in B.C. 153 this was made the official beginning of the new year. On this day, he was invoked as the god of good beginnings, and was honoured with cakes of meal called ianuae; every disturbance, every quarrel, was carefully avoided, and no more work was done than necessary to make a lucky beginning of the daily business of the year; mutual good wishes were exchanged, and people made presents of sweets to one another as a good omen that the new year might bring nothing but that which was sweet and pleasant in its train.

The beginning of the year is a time when a major change occurs, and is marked by ceremony and ritual. For the Romans, this juncture of the year, like every other juncture over which Janus presided, was a region in which change was more possible, more likely, than at any other time. Therefore, any immoderate behaviour, any departure from the normal daily pattern of life, whether through a quarrel or some other unpleasantness, might easily have taken root, and they might have found their whole lives dislocated as a result.

Seyffert continues that: ‘the origin of all organic life, and especially all human life, was referred to him; he was therefore called consivius (‘sower’). From him sprang all wells, rivers, and streams; in this relation he was called the spouse of Juturna, [51] the goddess of springs, and father of Fontus, [52] the god of fountains’. And:

> As the god of coming and going and of traffic, he had power not only on land, but also on sea; he was therefore described as the husband of the sea-goddess Venilia, [53] and as the discoverer of the art of shipbuilding. For this reason the Romans bore the impression of a ship on the obverse of the head of Janus.

In addition to this, in connexion with war:

> ... he was known in the fane founded by Numa near the ancient Forum, as Ianus Quirinus. When war was declared, the consul opened the double doors of this sanctuary and summoned the Roman youths capable of bearing arms to march through it with him. As long as war continued, the doors stood open, but on the declaration of peace they were closed.
>
> From the time of Numa to the year of the birth of Christ, this happened on four occasions only, and twice in the reign of Augustus. While Janus appears as the most ancient of the Roman gods, he is at the same time named as the most ancient king of the land, who dwelt upon the Janiculum on the right bank of the Tiber, and erected a temple to the gods and
> gave a friendly reception to Saturn. In very late times, he is represented with a bearded and an unbearded face; and, instead of his having the usual attributes of the key and the staff, the fingers of his right hand exhibit the number 300, and those of his left hand the number of the remaining days of the year.

Logical Modality in Classical Athens

We are accustomed to the idea that Aristotle was the first person to codify the laws of thought which have come down to us as the basis of what is now formal logic. For the most part, these laws are formulations and refinements of what is essentially common sense, so we are not forced to imagine that no-one had any clue about logical thinking before Aristotle. Plato for example, is not deficient in the logic of his thought processes because he came before Aristotle's codification.

However, there is much in ancient writing, earlier and later, and also in the pages of Plato, which is not easily intelligible as being based on the laws of thought, or even based on plain common sense. In fact, the laws of thought appear to be contradicted, and often. Are these just deficiencies in clarity of thought? Or is there another logical modality present in these writings, not codified by Aristotle or anybody else, but which was understood in classical Athens?

First, it is important to be clear about what is the essence of logical thinking, as codified by Aristotle. Aristotle's laws of thought are as follows:

The first is that a thing is itself and not something else. Which is known as the law of identity.

The second, the law of non-contradiction, states that a thing cannot be a thing other than itself, at least at the same time. Aristotle gives three

definitions of the law of non-contradiction in his *Metaphysics*:

At the ontological level, he says that: "It is impossible that the same thing belongs and not belong to the same thing at the same time and in the same respect". [54] Looked at from the psychological level, he says: "No one can believe that the same thing can (at the same time) be and not be". [55] Finally, in terms of logic, Aristotle claims that: "The most certain of all basic principles is that contradictory propositions are not true simultaneously". [56]

The third is the law of the excluded middle. Meaning that a thing is either itself, or something else, not something in between. He states it as a principle in the *Metaphysics,* [57] saying that "it is necessary in every case to affirm or deny, and that it is impossible that there should be anything between the two parts of a contradiction".

This is not part of Aristotle's manual of logical procedure, known as the *Organon*. The *Organon* codifies how the human understanding should deal with identifying and differentiating aspects of reality, reasoning, deduction, detecting false or misleading conclusions and specious modes of argument (the text on *Sophistical Refutations* is part of the *Organon*).

The *Metaphysics* is a text which employs the ancient practice of collection and division; of identifying the same, and what is different. We normally think of dialectic (which is the Greek term for this critical technique, perhaps most clearly illustrated in Plato's *Sophist*) as what the Greeks did in the course of philosophical argument, but its original scope was much wider than that. The practice of collection and division was also used in Babylonia and elsewhere in the second millennium B.C.E. Which is why the Babylonians and the Assyrians created lexical lists of objects which had

something in common, such the property of whiteness (scholars initially found the purpose of these lexical lists puzzling, and most still do). Marc van de Mieroop has recently published an intriguing study of the legal, divinatory, literary texts and word lists from Babylonia, which shows a strong adherence by the scholars to a logical understanding of what is the same, and what is different. Though he does not compare instances of the same and the different found in Babylonian literary texts and the word lists, with discussion of the same and the different found in the pages of Aristotle. [*Philosophy Before the Greeks*, Stanford, 2015].

The law of non-contradiction, as stated by Aristotle, isn't actually provable, though he tried to demonstrate it. Many later philosophers have tinkered with the law, but its main use is as a guide to thinking, and it is useful to know, even if it is possible to give instances where it does not hold.

Aristotle expounded a very curious view of the relationship between names and things in the *Metaphysics*:

> First then this at least is obviously true, that the word 'be' or 'not be' has a definite meaning, so that not everything will be 'so and not so'. Again, if 'man' has one meaning, let this be 'two-footed animal'; by having one meaning I understand this: if 'man' means 'X', then if A is a man 'X' will be what 'being a man' means for him. It makes no difference even if one were to say a word has several meanings, if only they are limited in number; for to each definition there might be assigned a different word. For instance, we might say that 'man' has not one meaning but several, one of which would have one definition, viz. 'two-footed animal', while there might be also several other definitions if only they were limited in number; for a peculiar name might be assigned to each of the definitions. If, however, they

> were not limited but one were to say that the word has an infinite number of meanings, obviously reasoning would be impossible; for not to have one meaning is to have no meaning, and if words have no meaning our reasoning with one another, and indeed with ourselves, has been annihilated; for it is impossible to think of anything if we do not think of one thing; but if this is possible, one name might be assigned to this thing.

— Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book IV, Part 4

All poetry, literature and art collapses at this point, where Aristotle claims that, in order to eliminate ambiguity in thought, there should be (as far as possible) a one to one correspondence between words and definitions. This would have made no sense to the Babylonians and to the Assyrians, whose literature is woven all through with wordplay - homonyms, synonyms, ideograms, logograms, phonograms, and a litany of interchangeable signs and signifiers.

I pass on to a discussion of the kind of logic invoked by Plato to understand the nature of reality. There are intimations in his canon that he understood pretty well the laws of thought that we find in Aristotle, but there is another logic present and discussed at length, which entirely cuts across the three laws, and enables a quite different picture of reality. Whereas Aristotle's laws of thought provide guidance for understanding what exists in the world of physical existence, what Plato tells us about is an esoteric doctrine, which explains what is hidden and obscure, and relates to the gods, and what is divine. As one might expect, the rules for the gods are different.

Plato had the concept of an inner and outer knowledge, which probably reflects something of a priestly understanding of both teaching and of

reality. He referred to these grades of knowledge as *ta eso* and *ta exo* In the *Theaetetus.* Which means that teaching operated at two levels – the exoteric and public level, and another which was esoteric in nature.

Esoteric knowledge is by definition obscure, and/or difficult to understand. Which is what the story of the prisoners in the cave in Plato's *Republic* is all about. They see the shadows of reality on the wall before them, but not the reality itself. When they are released with suddenness, their reason is deranged by the experience. Instead they should have been released gradually, being shown details of reality first, without the whole of the shocking truth of reality being given to them all at once. So, Plato was engaged with both exoteric and esoteric understandings of knowledge.

In Mesopotamia there was a similar division of the types of knowledge. We are told by the Assyrian king Esarhaddon (Seventh century B.C.E.) that the common run of men are 'deaf and blind throughout their lives'. [58] Exoteric knowledge of divine things would consist of the names of the gods, their epithets, and stories told of the gods. This superficial knowledge could be imparted by fathers to sons, and could be taught in the schoolroom, as sometimes is said in tablet colophons. The esoteric knowledge was kept secret by the initiates and the priesthood, and tablets relating to the mysteries of the gods would state that they were not to be read by the uninitiated.

In the *Timaeus* Plato refers to a principle of wholes, or totalities. [59] It is later mentioned by the Neoplatonist Porphyry as a Pythagorean doctrine, and Pythagoras is supposed to have learned of it in a lecture in Babylon, after the fall of the city to the Persians in 510 B.C.E. Since this principle of

totalities or wholes is ascribed to Pythagoras, if this ascription is correct, then the latest date of the principle is therefore the sixth century B.C.E.

It is of course, very much older. It can be detected in the *Iliad*, in Bk 18, where Hephaestus makes objects which, on account of their nature, can pass into the counsel of the gods, and return. The principle may have been brought back to the west by Pythagoras after his spell in Babylon and the Levant, or it may already have been part of a body of ideas already well established in Italy and in Greece. The principle might be simply put, as 'things which are total participate in totality', in the same way that Plato declared that 'greatness is participation in the great.' But it is so much more important than a statement that wholes conjoin with one another. It is the essence of the ascent from image to image to an apprehension of the Good which Plato refers to in the both the *Timaeus* and the *Republic*.

Each of these images must represent or embody an aspect of what Plato referred to as 'the Good'. Each of the images must allow the supplicant to pass from one to the other via their essential identity (i.e., in that each image represents an image or embodiment of an aspect of the Good). What varies between them is the degree of their participation in the Good. Plato is very clear that the viewer of the images must be able to pass along the chain of images in either direction. The chain of images is not therefore purely about gaining an understanding of the Good (meaning the divine, or Being itself), either in reality or figuratively. Passage through the chain of images is about both the transcendence of images or forms, and about the descent of Being into the world of generation, as a generative power.

Each of these images is a *symballō*, a conjecture, based on certain agreed ideas among the sacerdotal class, and different across cultural groupings. The images are thrown together in order to reduplicate and re-energise the power and presence of divine Being in the human world. For man, this might be seen as an act of worship or observance of what is holy, but it can also be understood also as a form of theurgy.

Since what we are given to understand about the differences between the patterns of the discussion of ideas in the near-east and in Greece, it may be surprising to hear that Pythagoras learned about the principles of wholes through lectures in Babylon. We know that ideas were discussed publicly in Mesopotamia, if usually in the form of a debate which explored the relative merits of one idea against another. It is possible that a lecture was the source of his knowledge of this doctrine, but it may be more likely, given the importance Pythagoras himself attached to the distinction between 'hearers' and 'students,' Pythagoras learned of the principle of wholes and totalities in some other way.

In the *Timaeus*, 30a-b, Plato speaks through Timaeus, saying:

> For God desired that, so far as possible, all things should be good and nothing evil; wherefore, when He took over all that was visible, seeing that it was not in a state of rest but in a state of discordant and disorderly motion, He brought it into order out of disorder, deeming that the former state is in all ways better than the latter. For Him who is most good it neither was nor is permissible to perform any action save what is most fair. As He reflected, therefore, He

> perceived that of such creature as are by nature visible, none that is irrational will be fairer, comparing wholes with wholes, than the rational….

Plato, in using the phrase ‘comparing wholes with wholes’, is referring to the principle of wholes and totalities mentioned in Porphyry’s account of Pythagoras.

It is interesting that Pythagoras is said to have associated with the ‘other Chaldeans,’ after Porphyry mentions his conferring with the king of Arabia. The current academic view is that the Chaldean dynasties were essentially Arab dynasties, and that they were in control of Babylon at this time. This helps to confirm the reliability of some of the detail in this important passage, written so long after the lifetime of Pythagoras.

So, what did Pythagoras take from his long sojourn in Egypt, and the near-east? Is his doctrine like Plato’s? Porphyry’s account tells us that:

> He cultivated philosophy, the scope of which is to free the mind implanted within us from the impediments and fetters within which it is confined; without whose freedom none can learn anything sound or true, or perceive the unsoundedness in the operation of sense. Pythagoras thought that mind alone sees and hears, while all the rest are blind and deaf. The purified mind should be applied to the discovery of beneficial things, which can be effected by, certain artificial ways, which by degrees induce it to the contemplation of eternal and incorporeal things, which never vary. This orderliness of

> perception should begin from consideration of the most minute things, lest by any change the mind should be jarred and withdraw itself, through the failure of continuousness in its subject-matter.[60]

To summarise: the principle of wholes can be understood as a logical modality which connects the world of the mundane with transcendent reality. The definition of transcendent reality in Plato (articulated by Socrates) is that it is a place beyond shape, form, size, etc., and occupies no place on earth.[61] It is however the place where knowledge has its reality (the 'eternal and incorporeal things' mentioned by Pythagoras). Connection with transcendent reality is possible by the likenesses to the transcendent which have existence on earth, such as things which are complete and whole, which therefore participate in the completeness and wholeness of the transcendent reality. Completeness and wholeness require (in the world of the mundane) delineation and limits, and so the limits and the extremes of things are also things which participate in transcendent reality.

The principle of ascent to the 'eternal and incorporeal things' is entirely a mental process, which does not involve any of the senses. It proceeds via chains of similitudes, both up and down, as a sequence of orderly perceptions. The goal is a form of communion with that which never varies, and which is always one and unchanging, as Plato tells us in the *Sophist*. The return from the communion with the Good delivers beneficial things, because the Good is the source of all knowledge.[62]

Is this a logical modality? Yes it is. It is the inverse of what is implied in Aristotle's three laws of thought, in that Aristotle is arguing that things are themselves and nothing else. And he suggests that similitude and likeness with other things is without meaning: no connection is opened to another level of reality. And that reason is only possible if the symbols we use in order to reason – words – have a one to one correspondence with the things we are talking about.

The doctrine of wholes and totalities is a logical modality, in that it enables, as does Aristotle's laws of thought, the articulation of identity, nature, and the relations of one thing to another. Its consequences for our understanding of the world are however, necessarily different.

Aristotle knew his teacher's work and views very well, and he spent many years in the Academy. So he would have been very conscious that he was contradicting Plato's argument about ascending to knowledge via the Forms. Whether when framing his laws of thought, Aristotle was making a serious assault on Plato, or just creating a mode of argument to flush out the intelligent student, is a question which is very hard to answer.

Sameness and Difference in Plato

Part of my first book, *The Sacred History of Being,* is devoted to a substantial discussion of the Ontological Argument. This may seem to be a rather odd inclusion in a book which is essentially about the idea of the plenum, and the presence of that idea in ancient history, at least as far back as the 14th century before the common era. The reason the discussion is there is because philosophical writing about the divine in the west departed from the consideration of reality as something intricately bound up with a plenum during the Middle Ages. As a result, philosophical argument about the divine, all the way up to the present day, cannot deal credibly with certain issues, and no longer resembles the kind of argument about the divine found in ancient literature. The ontological argument, as formulated from the Middle Ages onwards, contains within itself the essence of the problem. Which is why I subjected it to a critical examination.

Essentially philosophy, as a craft and a discipline, is broken in the modern world. It spends a lot of time running around in circles, chasing its own tail, and is unable to resolve important questions. Philosophy is of course, by its very nature, difficult to do well, since it concerns itself with questions which are fundamental to our understanding of both ourselves and the world. However, some of the difficulties encountered by philosophers over the past thousand years or so are *problems with the presumptions of philosophy itself*, not the complexity of the materials with which it works.

A striking feature of Plato's discussion of the divine is his equation of the divine (*ho Theos*) with reality itself. He also speaks of the divine in the singular, within the context of a polytheistic culture. Why does he do this?

The answer is that he understood the idea that behind the world of appearance was an undifferentiated plenum. Unlike many modern philosophers, who take physical existence as a given, and do not ask fundamental questions about what physical existence is, and how it came to be, the question of how it came to be was something which was referenced not just in Plato's *Timaeus*, which overtly addresses the question, but was a concern which surfaces in his other dialogues. The nature of the creation therefore was understood to have a bearing on many other questions which the philosopher ought to consider.

A key part of the concept of the plenum is that it represents our human understanding of how the world must have been before anything came to have physical existence. Modern cosmological models of the creation of the universe (such as they are), assume that there was some kind of creation *ex nihilo*, though the process is necessarily mysterious when looked at from the point of view of physics. The major problem with the idea of a physical creation, is that there is no physics before the creation, no laws of nature, no space, no extension, and no time. There is a complete absence of the principal characteristics of the physical world that we are familiar with. So there is nothing for a physicist to grapple with. Hence most discussion of the creation concerns itself with the hypothetical first microseconds after all these characteristics are imagined to magically and mysteriously appear.

Yet *there is no absence at the root of the creation*. To say that there is such an absence, is to presume the existence of a presence with which absence can be contradistinguished. There is nothing at all that we can define as an absence. Whatever it is, it transcends the category, 'absence'. It is neither one thing, or its opposite. It simply is what it is.

How does recognising the transcendent nature of the underlying plenum change the way we must argue about the creation? The definition of the plenum is that, since it is something which cannot be understood as a presence or an absence, it represents instead the potential for such differentiation; in that sense it can be understood as a fullness of what it itself is. It is also the one thing which is truly real, in that it is itself, and does not change its nature. It is beyond time, space and extension. It is eternal, and eternally itself.

How then is the generation of physical reality, with its laws and properties, to be explained? Plato sometimes uses different terminology to refer to the same ideas in his dialogues, which has made some of his meaning opaque, but he does use the idea of the same and the different in connection with the creation of time, using the image of the celestial equator and the ecliptic. According to this image, time began when the two circles were set at an angle to each other.

In referring to the same and the different, Plato is alluding to what we understand as the Pythagorean notion of the undefined dyad. If reality (the plenum) is one, and the one by itself alone, then, if more than one of

anything is to have some kind of existence, the plenum must come to some kind of relationship with itself. So, the plenum (the same) must in some way stand in relation to itself as the different.

This of course is an abstract notion. The plenum is eternally itself, and unchanging. It is also one. If there is to be more than one, or a multiplicity of anything, this can only be in the form of a representation within the nature of the plenum. The representation is not truly real, and any movement within that representation is also not truly real.

This is the origin of the widespread notion in antiquity that the world is illusion, or Maya. The fact that aspects of this illusion can have fatal consequences to individuals, if a rock falls off a mountain, or if people are swept away by a flood, does not undermine the notion that the physical world is illusion, in comparison with the reality of the underlying plenum. Neither does the fact that the physical world is structured according to strict rules, and also functions according to strict rules of what is and is not possible.

Shar Kishati, and the Cult of Eternity

This is part of a chapter from the draft of *The Sacred History of Being* which was under way in 2004. The chapter did not make it through to the final version which was published in November 2015, though I did write about the same things in the published version, in slightly different terms. I had moved on considerably in those eleven years.

Trying to separate out key aspects of Greek and Mesopotamian models of Reality, as I did here, was something of a methodological conceit, and the discussion of the hypothetical core of the ancient understanding of Reality as something which might be separated from everything else, doesn't mean that such a hypothetical core existed apart from the rest of the religious and theological implex of ideas which constituted Greek and Mesopotamian religion. The point of the exercise was to explore what was actually essential to that implex of ideas, and to get a better understanding of why it was important to the functioning of the ritual universe in both Greece and Mesopotamia.

So this text should be understood as a snapshot of how I was approaching the ancient data, and the different points of view I was exploring, as part of the study in 2004.

Essentially what I called in this text the 'Cult of Eternity' revolves around the 'Doctrine of Totalities', which is mentioned in connection with Pythagoras, is described by Plato, mentioned by the Neoplatonists, and is

also referenced in a Nag Hammadi text. We know the doctrine was known in Babylon, and it is possible that Pythagoras learned of it while he was there. It is in fact a logical modality, though currently it is not recognised as such. It can be argued that this logical modality underpins the entire intellectual edifice of Mesopotamian thought, and much of the philosophical thought in ancient Greece, from Pythagoras onwards.

I have taken the liberty of re-Englishing some of the text, but the argument is as it was.

Thomas Yaeger, October 17, 2016

Defining the Cult

Why characterise the beliefs of some elite groups in Greece and Mesopotamia as cultic, rather than considering them simply as elite groups functioning within the social and institutional structures of these cultures?

The reason for this is quite simple: the belief system of these elite groups is at variance with aspects of the more broadly-based belief system of the culture in which the cult is embedded. The cult in question enshrines a pattern of belief which is shared by a small and influential group; it has great meaning for that group, and it informs almost every aspect of their lives. It has all the characteristics of individuated cults – liturgy, ritual, festival, sacred objects and images, etc. It also has a secret at its core, which is often a feature of individuated cult.[63]

It is not strictly a secret society however – or at least we have no reason to believe that it functioned entirely in secret. This does not mean that it functioned in public – rather that it functioned as an elite club, occasionally admitting new members, according to merit. Thus, it would be possible for individuals outside the group to know something of its existence, and perhaps to know individuals who belonged to the group, as well as perhaps knowing the time and place of ritual, etc. But these individuals would not know any significant detail of the cult, either in terms of practice or belief.[64] It is a secret society however in terms of it having secret aims and beliefs, and a restricted membership.

Its function was religious. The detail of what was involved and the belief system which underpinned this activity is the focus of this study. In essence what we have uncovered is a way of thinking of some importance in history. It underpins the historical development of many ancient religions, even if it is not itself older than these religions, or is not native to the region in which the religions grew up.

It needs a name, if we are not always to be returning to the details of its nature and influence in order to indicate its involvement. I have decided to call this phenomenon the ‘Cult of Eternity’, since it is clear that emulation of the nature of eternity is the principal goal of this school of thought: the source of the cult is the understanding of the importance of invariance above all else, and the members of the cult are focussed on eternity. Eternity is a concept which all important religions - of which we have knowledge - have.

We are *not* talking here about an organisation with physical and intellectual continuity across both time and the geography of the ancient world when we talk about the 'Cult of Eternity': what we are talking about is a way of thinking which might have been transmitted by contact between elite groups over large geographical distances, but which, alternatively, might as easily come to exist at a certain place and time whether or not such actual contact has occurred. If it can arise as a notion spontaneously in the mind of one man, then it has arrived within the culture in question. [65]

If it subsequently informs the theological and religious structures of that culture, then that form of cultic belief is of importance to the understanding of that culture, and its dynamics.

It must be understood as a cult in the sense that it involves a shared set of beliefs, understandings, and practices belonging to a small group within ancient cultures. [66] The true nature of these cultic beliefs were not understood – and perhaps not even suspected outside of members of the royal court, and some parts of the priesthood.

Notwithstanding the fact that we can often trace the ideas of the cult in the art and literature and language of a culture, where elements associated with the cult have shaped the outward form of the institutional religion, the nature of the core ideas of the cult, then as now, make it very unlikely that any but a small group of people with control of the political and religious hegemony could hold these beliefs.

The Pattern of Belief

What is the essential nature of this cultic belief? It can be stated quite simply, though its difficult passage through history has been as a consequence of the fact that its essential nature it is so easy to miss, and to lose, without any sense that something important has been lost.

It is lost when the understanding that the doctrine enshrines images which are understood as recollections of the *ur* reality, turns into the notion that the images themselves, whether in ritual or narrative or poetic form, represent the matter of the cult, rather than pointers and paths to the real goal of the cult.

In essence the central belief of the cult is that reality itself is utterly transcendent of all the characteristics and properties of earthly existence.

The divine, as a consequence of this understanding, is understood as entirely beyond our human ability to grasp, except in terms of a crude inversion of the categories normally employed in our understanding. This idea of reality is conveyed and referred to by means of a number of images – these may be actual images, through descriptions of images, through ritual, through narrative, and through mythic and poetic constructs.

One of the key concepts of this cult is the distinction between the secular and the eternal. Most of the desirable (and as Robert Graves might say,

'nostalgic') characteristics of reality are imaged in the idea of the eternal. It does not move, does not participate, but simply is itself. The moving image of eternity, which is of central importance in the Greek version of the doctrine of the cult, is the one which does participate in generation, which does move. Significantly, it is itself described as an image, since it, along with all the elements of secularity within the moving image, is an approximation, a metaphor to the all but indescribable and unreachable.

The second aspect of this pattern of belief in a completely transcendent ur reality, is that there are certain areas of earthly reality which are closely connected with the ur reality. These areas are the limits or boundaries of things. A characteristic of a limit or a boundary is that it is the place where something passes into something else. In this place, the utter limit of something is no longer what it is, but is the place between what that thing was (whatever it was) and the thing which is beyond. In other words, the boundary or limit is a no-man's-land in terms of categorical understanding.

In consequence, it resembles very strongly the nature of the divine.

Why this Pattern?

Why do these properties of both the ur reality and of boundaries and limits have such importance for those involved in the cult? Because the *ur* reality is the place of generation, the place of the *ur* decisions – the principal separations and divisions of eternity, the place of ultimate completion – the ur of all and everything. Like the soil of the original home of a tribe, packed into its ritual altar, its 'first earth', eternity is the place and condition of resort when change, joining, sundering, enhancement, and judgement are required. The devotee of the cult can, by means of its

rituals and discipline, both travel there, and bring eternity to the here and now.

The tribe need not have a theory of being to know the importance of 'first earth', and it is not necessary for there to be a theory of being behind the existence and importance of the practice. However it is clear that the concept of an *ur* reality has abstracted to the nth degree many of the simpler notions which occur to man, and brought them together, as Solon suggested to Croesus, 'to arrive at the proper time and agree'.[67] Where we find many clues to the existence of this abstracted and rarified vision of the other in one or several cultures, we cannot ignore these clues without damaging our capacity to understand the cultural processes at work.

One of the problems which historians face in studying the ancient world is the problem of studying patterns of belief which, are full of the practice of things which have become reprehensible or meaningless - magic, witchcraft, divination and sacrifice. To the modern scholar, these are credulous beliefs, without foundation in anything which makes sense to the rational mind, and so the historian is expected to have no sympathy with the patterns of thought involved - beyond that necessary to explore the social and cultural dynamics of these beliefs in the material under examination. It is of course perfectly possible to write an excellent study of a belief system without the writer sharing that belief system, but, for the sake of professional credibility, it is important that objectivity – the 'not sharing' in the belief system under study – is visible and public. Hence there is a tendency for historians to avoid as far as possible discussion of beliefs and the intellectual undertow of ancient practice, and where they

find it necessary to engage with it, they usually describe rather than analyse.

The difficulty of a historian is therefore very great, if we attempt to bring in from the cold the common practice of the ancient world, and its intellectual origins within a pattern of cultic belief and ritual. If it is more like what we understand than we (formerly) understood, and belongs to the known tradition of understanding the world in terms of the relationship between being and the world of becoming, then a danger emerges that the work involved might seem like a rehabilitation rather than an objective study.[68]

Who would be safe? The objectivity of a discipline can mean that the object of study is preferred lying dead on the dissecting table, rather than as something whose whole nature requires study as a living thing: the object is studied as an 'it' rather than as a 'thou'. Where its dynamics are explored, these are often framed within modern models of the forces at work in social structures, since these are the product of rational discussion over many decades, and give us the tools and approaches to understand social dynamics.

But is this really adequate as an approach? The cultures of the ancient world once lived, and it is important to look at them as living things, driven by their own will and concerns. Looking at these cultures as supported and vivified by the powerhouse of a theory of Being allows us to understand what it is that shapes them, and to understand the connections between

that powerhouse and more distributed and diffuse practices and phenomena.[69]

The cult itself is sustained by the inner logic of its belief system. Based on the understanding of the importance of the concept of the eternal, it shares several features with the religion in which it functions as the intellectual core, supplying access to the functional aspects of the ur reality. Serving in this way, it has a technical language, and technical logic. Much of this, particularly in the fine detail, is lost to us within Mesopotamian culture, and we must also use non-textual evidence as part of the recovery technique. But sometimes it peeps out at us, utterly inexplicable within the now traditional modes of interpretation which are applied to near eastern civilisations.

One example of this is the Akkadian phrase 'Shar Kishati', which was applied to Assyrian Kings in the 1st Millennium B.C.E. The phrase literally means: 'King of Totality'. This makes very poor sense outside of the context of a cultic model for the importance of the king – the phrase does not specify the nature or context of the totality – whether it is to be understood as a totality of nations, of peoples, or even of the world.

Within the context of a cult which has the pursuit of eternity at its core, the epithet makes perfect sense: totality is one of the ways in which eternity may be spoken of, since the eternal is the undivided and undifferentiated ur reality, before the creation, the moving image of the same. The phrase 'King of the Four Quarters' similarly does not refer (except where made explicit) to earthly power and hegemony. The 'four

quarters' refer to a division of the *ur* reality or totality made by the cult, in which the properties of kingship are defined in terms of different images of his transcendence over the world.

These images are connected with the bull, the ram, the eagle, and man. Other combinations of images are possible, and found, but these four are the principle ones. Very often aspects of these animals are brought together in images of the King and of the sages, so that the leg of the king is overmuscled to invoke the strength of the bull; his cloak is feathered in order to invoke the power and clarity of vision of the eagle, [70] and he wears a torque around his arm whose ends are marked with ram's heads, a favoured animal for the purposes of enquiry by divination. The human part of the quartet represents intelligence and the rational part of the soul.

That this totality of the four quarters is something to which limits and borders are closely associated is clear from the fact that the quartet of images is often combined in the sacred winged bulls, found situated within the limits of palaces and temples, marking the gateway between the precincts of the palace or temple, and the outside secular world of movement and change.

The Harmony of the Soul

Justice is spoken of in Plato's *Republic* as one of the four cardinal virtues; the others being wisdom, courage and self-discipline (prudence; temperance or moderation in older translations) [428e]. Justice however, proves to be more difficult to define than the other virtues for the participants in the discussion, and they find that its definition cannot be approached directly. Therefore, they decide to define the other virtues first, in the hope that what is left over will prove to be justice

After the other virtues have been defined, the participants find that justice remains elusive. Socrates suggests a change of approach, and gains the agreement of Adeimantus and Glaucon that justice may be characteristic of both individuals and communities, and since communities are larger than individuals, justice may be easier to discern in the context of the polis.

> "We may therefore find justice on a larger scale in the larger entity, and so easier to recognize. I accordingly propose that we start our inquiry with the community, and then proceed to the individual and see if we can find in the conformation of the smaller entity anything similar to what we have found in the larger." [71]

Socrates discusses the origin of the state (the polis) and argues that it arises out of need, because individuals are not self-sufficient. The basic needs are food, shelter and clothing, and the creation of the polis supplies these needs. Such basic needs, he argues, are best met by the individuals who make up the polis pursuing their own natural aptitudes, which are different for each and fit them for different jobs. [72] Hence Socrates argues that "we do better to exercise one skill" rather than attempting to

practice several. Further, the workman must be able to function at the right moment for action and thus: "a professional at the call of his job will not wait till he has leisure to spare for it." [73] The division of labour within the structure of the polis means that both the quality of the work done and the quantity produced are greater if individuals specialize in this way "on a single job for which he is naturally fitted, and neglects all others", whether he be a craftsman or a businessman."

Where then is justice in the state? Adeimantus suggests that it is to be found somewhere in the mutual relationship of the various elements which make up the state [372a]. The state is not wise, for example, because of the knowledge of its carpenters concerning woodworking and the excellences of that craft [428a], no matter how vital the craft may be to life: this kind of knowledge is too specific in its nature. Socrates asks whether there is

> any form of knowledge to be found among any of the citizens in the state... which is exercised not on behalf on any particular interest but on behalf of the city as a whole, in such a way to benefit the state both in its internal and external relations? [428c]

The answer is that there is, and it is possessed by the guardians, the class of citizens whose special purpose it is to defend the polis (other men cannot do this and pursue their own natural abilities). These men, as citizens, are wise and capable of being just in the abstract, rather than in the particular.

That is, it is possible for individual souls to be just, as well as a community. The implication seems to be that they have some important feature in common which makes them just; but what justice *is*, remains elusive, until Socrates remarks that:

> our quarry is lurking right under our feet all the time and we haven't seen it... like people searching for something they have in their hands all the time [432d].

He suggests that it is in fact the requirement laid down at the beginning of the discussion, that "one man was to do one job, the job he was naturally most suited for" [433a]; and that it is the quality left over, after discipline, courage and wisdom have been identified, which "makes it possible for them to come into being in our state and preserves them by its continued presence when they have done so" [433b].

He argues that the duty of the ruler is to administer justice, and that to do this they will "follow the principle that men should not take other people's belongings or be deprived of their own... their reason... being that it is just" [433e]. Injustice is therefore defined as the opposite of the pursuit of special excellences, so that someone attempting to move from one of the three principal classes in the polis to another, say from the class of artisans to the military class, by means of wealth or physical strength, is attempting to enter a sphere for which he is unfit; the same is true if the individual attempts to pursue several or all functions simultaneously.

Socrates claims that "this sort of mutual interchange and interference spells destruction to our state" [434a-b]; and describes such a state of affairs as "the worst of evils".

This then, is the soul writ large, and justice, having been defined in the state as the mutual relations of its various elements, each pursuing its own special excellence and occupying its particular place within the social structure, must, if the individual is to be just, involve a similar structure and set of relationships within the soul.

Thus Socrates argues that there are three principal aspects of the soul: the Reason, the Spirit, and the Appetite, corresponding respectively to the three principal classes in the state, which are: the Guardians, the military class, and the class of artisans and businessmen. Thus, the whole structure of the state is tied in closely with the 'Myth of the Cave' and the 'Simile of the Sun', as well as the matter of the 'Divided Line', discussed later in the *Republic*.

The first and third of these correspondences are fairly easy to understand, but the middle of the three is a different and difficult matter, and Plato himself is unclear about it, though he warns us that his method is not to be regarded as precise. Each of these aspects of the soul must follow its own interests, like the various classes within the state. Justice is concerned,

"not with external actions, but with a man's inward self, his true concern and interest. The just man will not allow the three elements... to trespass on each other's functions or interfere with each other, but, by keeping all three in tune, like the notes of a scale... will in the truest sense set his house to rights, attain self-mastery and order, and live on good terms with himself" [443c-e].

The just individual has become one instead of many and "will be ready for action of any kind (recalling the workman pursuing his special excellence) ... and will call the knowledge which controls such action wisdom." Injustice is action which destroys this disposition and capacity, and opinions, as opposed to knowledge and wisdom, which control such action, are defined as ignorance [443e]:

"Injustice is a kind of civil war between these… three elements... when the elements of the mind are confused and displaced... [this] constitutes

injustice, indiscipline, cowardice, ignorance, and, in short, wickedness of all kinds" [444b-c].

The relations of the parts of the soul, whether harmonious or inharmonious, is further compared with the physical health of the body: health being defined as being produced by establishing a natural relation of control and subordination among the constituents of the body, whereas disease is produced through the establishment of an un-natural relation [444d].

The question remains to be asked: if all these elements are to be bound together in harmony, how is this achieved by letting each constituent of the soul or state pursue its own special excellence, its function?

It seems to us a very *laissez faire* arrangement, and clearly the polis is some kind of entity beyond the mere assemblage of its parts. It would not do, for example, for the entire body of the citizenry to consist of carpenters, no matter how great their skills, no matter how excellent their designs. Likewise, a polis full of Guardians would have difficulty in supplying the needs of the citizenry in respect of food, clothing and shelter. Clearly Plato assumes that a proper order, a proportionate order of the classes of the citizens, is *natural.* I.e., that it is in the nature of reality for separate things to be joined together in a proportionate way. It would seem that the way this harmonious arrangement arises is by each of the elements of the whole pursuing its own special excellence, but it is not altogether obvious why this should work out properly.

The reason for the difficulty here is that we look at things upside down with respect to the Greek perception of reality. Assuming (as we tend to do) that reality is an aggregation of elements which add up to make substance and action, we cannot easily understand how it is that order has

a natural place in the resulting arrangements. But the Greeks thought (with the exception of materialists like Democritus) *teleologically*, so that the universe (*in toto*) was thought of as complete and perfect in itself.

What we encounter in our experience is this complete and perfect totality unwound and disassembled to various degrees, so that things are not present in the proper proportions and order. However, if things are brought to their proper ends, to their own perfection and completion, then, *on the basis of the analogy with the cosmos at large, all the parts of that individual entity, that particular whole, must be present in a proper and harmonious order* (which echoes the character of the argument about the nature of the soul on the basis of the larger entity of the polis).

Thus it is that the pursuit of special excellences by individuals, in terms of skills, and moral and intellectual virtue, without reference to the activities of other individuals, was understood to result in such a harmonious arrangement. They are joined together as a consequence of the fact that each of the virtues is complete and perfected, and thus each participates in the completion and perfection of, the individual, the polis, and ultimately the cosmos itself. [74]

Synoikismos and the Origins of the Polis

The definition of the polis, as understood by the Greeks themselves, and as transmitted to us, is far from clear; its origins and archaic development seem to be beyond recovery. We can say a few things with certainty: that it is the central institution of Greek society, and that there could be no politics without the polis. According to Aristotle, it is an entity which is not too large or too small, and other ancient sources have been taken to imply the necessity of the agora. In addition, it must be an autonomous entity with surrounding territory (chora). However, it is misleading to think of the polis as a city-state along the lines of the Italian city-states of the Renaissance, for instance, because some possessed a population of no more than 600 citizens.

One of the oldest references to the polis appears in the *Iliad* [Bk xviii], in Homer's description of the shield of Achilles wrought by Hephaestus. On this shield was represented the world, the earth, the heaven, the sea, the sun, the moon, the constellations, and:

> In it likewise he wrought two fair cities of articulate speaking men. In the one... there were marriages and feasts; and they were conducting the brides from their chambers through the city with brilliant torches... and the people were crowded together in an assembly, and there a contest had arisen; for two men contended for the ransom money of a slain man: the one affirmed that he had paid all, appealing to the people; but the other denied, declaring that he had received nothing: and both wished to find an end (of the dispute) before a judge. The people were applauding both, the supporters of either party... the elders sat upon polished stones, in a

> sacred circle, and (the pleaders) held in their hands the staves of the clear-voiced heralds; with these... they arose, and alternately pleaded their cause.

This passage contains details which appear in classical definitions of the polis: the physical city, the joining together of people, an assembly, the orderly resolution of disputes, appeal to the people and arbitration by a judge. The elders sitting in a sacred circle probably prefigure the council(s) of the polis. The second city appears to be the reverse of the former in its essence: a place of discord and distrust, of war and ambush. Not at all desirable, but a place to be included in a representation of the world.

A description of a polis appears in the *Odyssey* [bk. vi. 262ff]. It mentions a high wall and gates on each side of the city, stations for ships, a market-place around a temple of Poseidon, "fitted with large stones dug out of the earth". This passage indicates the existence of large conurbations at a relatively early period, but it would be unreasonable to infer from this description of a particular polis that each of the features described are essential features of the polis (i.e., a polis situated far inland cannot have stations for large ships).

Further evidence that the polis was a defined concept in Homeric times is indicated in Bk. vi, 4-10, where the foundation of a colony is described. Men were settled "in Scheria far away from enterprising men... (the Phoenicians); and ... ("godlike Nausithous") drew a wall around the city, and built houses, and made temples for the gods, and divided the plains". This foundation of an "apoikia" is echoed in its details in a passage found in Plato's *Laws* [745b-e] which describes the just foundation and layout of a polis, "as far as possible in the centre of its chora"; and the division of the whole into twelve parts, after an area has been designated for the principal

gods, to be called the acropolis. A wall is to be built around it; "then it is possible to lay out the twelve parts, both in the polis itself and in the chora as a whole", And after the creation of the tribes and their allocation to the twelve gods, and the distribution of the land, the foundation is said to be complete.

Negative evidence for the nature of the polis in Homeric times appears in the account of the Cyclops given by Odysseus [*Od*. Ix., 106ff] who says that

> they have no laws, who, trusting in the immortal gods, neither plant a plant with their hands, nor plough: but all these things unsown, untilled, spring up, wheat and barley, and vines, which bear wine from large clusters...

The real horror of the Cyclops' situation is that "there are neither assemblies for consulting, nor rights". In short, the Cyclops live without the principal features of the polis, inhabiting "the summits of lofty mountains in hollow caves", unlike the citizens who live in the plains, "and everyone gives judgement to his children and wives", as opposed to the Greek practice. Finally, we are told that the Cyclops have no care for one another.

In the *Works and Days* Hesiod too sees the polis as a place where justice should reign and where fair arbitration ought to be obtainable:

When judgements are fair - alike for strangers as for the local folk - and the judges undiverted from what is right, then a polis blooms and the people in it prosper. For such a place Zeus, all seeing, does not ordain the misery of war (recalling the inverted polis on the shield of Achilles), so the young men grow up in the land in peace. Men of justice know nothing of famine or ruin, as they feast upon the produce of their fields: the earth offers

them a life of plenty... As for the women, they bring forth sons to match their fathers.

Thus says Hesiod, "their blessings are perpetual: the fertile land yields up its crops - and they never set foot on a ship". By this Hesiod seems to be referring to one of the most probable causes of colonization: shortage of land, or its infertility. But, in common with most Greeks he sees a relation between fact and value, so that bad times for a polis are likely to be the actions of bad citizens:

> often a whole polis has suffered because of the evil of one man who is a sinful and wicked schemer: the son of Kronos sends down from heaven a great and universal calamity, famine and plague at the same time, so that the people waste away; no children are born to the women, and oikoi die out; such is the decision of Olympian Zeus. [75]

Thus, though calamity might seem like sufficient practical reason for the foundation of an "apoikia", this pattern of belief suggests strongly that colonists might be expelled for fear of contagion if they were perceived to be tainted with the evil which had befallen the polis (it seems that colonists were chosen to go by the polis, and it was not up to to the choice of the individual), whether or not the continued presence of the colonists would have prejudiced the survival of the polis in strictly causal terms. In practice, this would have been an excellent way of settling old scores and redistributing land, principally in favour of the rich. [76]

Turning to the archaeological evidence, there exists an inscription from the Cretan city of Dreros, which gives some insight into the structure of a polis in the archaic period. [77] It tells of a decision made by the polis about the office of "Kosmos" (apparently a chief magistrate), limiting its tenure and

laying down specific conditions for the holder of the office (Aristotle claims a parallel significance for Spartan Ephors and the Cretan Kosmi, to which I shall return later). The seventh century Draconian Law on Homicide is the oldest extant Greek law code, and has been used in the past to suggest a drift towards written and therefore public law, at least in some parts of Greece. [78] However, according to Crawford and Whitehead [op. cit., p65], modern scholars regard the Constitution of Drako as the result of fifth century pamphleteering. Another stele, the Law from Chios, contains "the earliest secure reference to a Boule... of the people", and, it is argued, its power to levy fines and judge appeals (c600-550 B.C.) "attests the growth of the popular element within the state at a relatively early period." [79]

Later sources, naturally, are retrospective. Thucydides gives some information on the "synoikismos" of Attica (settling together). In Bk. ii. 15 he says that, from the time of the first kings "down to Theseus (the legendary founder of Athens, whose name is probably related to the verb tithemi, "to set in place") the people of Attica:

> always lived in (their own) poleis, each one with its own administrative buildings and officials; unless there was some common danger they would not come together in council with the king, but each individual polis would govern itself in accordance with its own decisions.

In this case it is clear that the foundation of the Athenian polis did not involve the inauguration of basic institutions: each polis had its administrative buildings and officials, and took its own decisions. When Theseus came to the throne (as the Athenians wished to believe) he:

> organised the chora on a proper basis, chiefly by doing away with the multiplicity of poleis and their separate councils and governments;

> on his scheme there was only one polis... and one seat of decision making and administration.

So the synoikismos of Theseus had nothing to do with the foundation of the polis as an idea, but was instead a particular exemplification of the idea. What was his motive? This was total synoikismos:

> everyone was free, just as before, to look after his own affairs, but there was now only one place - Athens - which Theseus allowed them to treat as a polis.
>
> The synoikismos of Theseus was the completion of a unity: the population was not moved, but the political unit was now Attica instead of a multitude of "poleis".

There is a tendency among scholars to conflate synoikismos (interpreted here as the process leading to the creation of the polis) and the development of urbanism. The two are emphatically not the same and to assume that they are does not much illuminate the emergence of the polis. Aristotle's view of the development of the polis [*Politics* 1, 1252-3] is, on one level an example of this kind of error: his account is warped by a combination of two factors: his view of the world in teleological terms, leading him to postulate an evolution of the polis; and his systematic programme (which surfaces in all of his work) of leading the Greeks to virtue through common sense, which determines the character of that evolution. He sees the polis as the natural outcome of a teleological process which he outlines as follows: first the oikos which is the

> natural unit established to meet all man's daily needs... then, when a number of oikia are first united for the satisfaction of something more than day-to-day needs, the result is the village... finally the

> ultimate partnership, made up of numbers of villages and having already attained the height... of self sufficiency - this is the polis.

I.e., it has become complete. "It has come into being in order, simply that life can go on; but it now exists so as to make that life a good life". Each of its constituent parts (the villages) are seen as leading up to the polis and, "for a process to reach its consummation is only natural"

Aristotle argues that the oikos is built out of two unions: that of male and female and of master and slave, and the latter are joined together out of mutual interest. He explains the relationship between master and slave by saying that intelligence and foresight naturally belong to the ruling element, and the partner with the capacity for physical labour will naturally be subject. Thus, kings are explained as the outcome of master and slave within the oikos. The relationships between male and female and master and slave, he argues, are different, except in the case of the barbaroi: "among the barbaroi... female and slave... fill the same position. The reason for this is that the barbaroi possess no naturally ruling element". Hence the Greeks have as much right to rule the barbaroi as their own slaves.

This preposterous argument serves a crucial function, for his argument about the development of the polis makes it virtually indistinguishable from the development of the city, making the development of the polis universal, given the same conditions. Thus the polis ceases to be a uniquely Greek phenomenon. To restore its uniqueness Aristotle has to assert the racial superiority of the Greeks over the barbaroi: only the Greeks can develop the polis, since only they are truly human. Further, Aristotle is forced to deny the obvious, in that his argument implies that no urban developments of the kind described had occurred elsewhere. Not only is

this nonsense, but the absurdity is underlined by the fact that in the same book he describes the Carthaginian political system, showing it to parallel closely many aspects of the polis. [80]

Roebuck, in his article "Some aspects of urbanization in Corinth." [81] also presents a case for synoikismos: i.e., he attempts to understand the development of the polis there in terms of an evolution (though naturally not a teleological one). Thus he interprets the archaeological remains as marking the development of the synoikismos towards the polis, as if the concept of the polis necessarily bears a fixed relation to its concrete remains. He discusses the relative merits of whether or not the material development of Corinth was the result of agriculture or commerce, and sees the presence of temples and other structures as stages in the upgrading towards the status of polis, confusing the remains with the institutions, which did not necessarily have a parallel evolution. For instance, if the synoikismos of the expanded Athenian polis reflects an actual occurence, and it came into being of a piece as the result of the imposition of an idea, then there was no evolution as such. No people were moved (unless we credit Plutarch's account) and the material remains would hardly reflect the change. Unless it turns up inscriptions and documents, archaeology can tell us little about this kind of change.

If the polis is neither the same thing as a city, nor its material infrastructure, we should decide what it is that the polis could be:

1. A passage from Thucydides makes it quite clear that the polis is not the same as the city, but that it is wherever the citizens are [vii. 77. 4.]. Why the citizens constitute a polis remains to be determined.

2. Is the polis a tribal entity? It certainly involved the tribes but did not depend on particular tribal arrangements, for the polis continued to exist after Cleisthenes' reforms and the breaking up of the old tribes.

3. Is it a place of law under which the citizens live? Yes. However, this is not unique to the Greeks: the Carthaginians lived under law, and the Assyrians also (the kings' word was law). Is it written law? No, for the Spartans were accredited as Greeks and the Lycurgan rhetra were specifically unwritten. Yet they lived as citizens of a polis. Certainly according to Hesiod the polis was a place where justice ought to be had (though he was cynical about the likelihood of getting it).

4. Is the polis necessarily democratic? Not in the late archaic and classical sense, though the presence of democratic arrangements did not destroy the polis *considered as a physical entity*. The polis existed as a *concept* before the existence of democracy, being mentioned by both Homer and Hesiod. It also existed under oligarchic control.

5. Is the polis an ordered, hierarchical community? Yes, but this does not distinguish it from other cities in antiquity.

6. Is the polis a concept associated with the making of decisions? It is a characteristic of the polis that decisions are made, whatever the character of its rulership. A tyrant decides for his pleasure, an oligarch decides for "the best", and the demos, according to one's inclination, either falls prey to whatever seizes its imagination at the time, or else functions as the voice of the gods; a king, like the oligarchs, decides for the best on account of his supposed proximity to the divine.

7. Does the polis enshrine freedom? Yes, for it is only with freedom that decisions can be made, and therefore, according to Aristotle, virtue acquired [cf. the *Nicomachean Ethics*, particularly concerning the

distinction between voluntary and involuntary acts]. The polis makes men free, and therefore where men are free there is a polis. The corollary of this is that where men can acquire virtue and have honour, they are free. Each of the Greek states has in common - apart from linguistic affinities - a common interest in honour and virtue. They differ from each other in the manner in which honour and virtue are achieved (i.e., the Spartans emphasised narrow military virtues).

8. Is the polis a place where there is specialization of official functions? To some extent, although most of the Greeks prided themselves on the amateur nature of their offices, almost as a guarantee of the purity of their institutions. At any rate, arguments for specialization of functions again blurs the distinction between the development of the polis and the rise of urbanism.

9. Does the polis promote attachment to something beyond the individual - i.e., the polis before the individual and his purely personal obligations? Yes, but pressure in this direction also comes from tribal association and obligation to a king, as well as being a sporadic feature of the development of urbanism.

10. Is assembly a necessary feature of the polis? Judging by the horror at the Cyclops lack of assembly, yes.

It might be argued that what we see in the institution of the polis is a secularization of decision making, the decisions no longer being made in consultation with the divine (through oracle and sacrifice), but now made by the community via the institutions (various councils; the ekklesia). In this respect, it might be significant that (as far as I am aware) there were no oracular seats in Attica. However, the secularization argument is probably mistaken: oracles continued to be consulted.

Perhaps it would be better to see the citizens functioning as a kind of "college of cardinals" (*vox populi, vox dei*), so that the style of man's relation to the divine has changed, rather than the connection being attenuated or abandoned altogether. If so, we might expect the carrying over of institutions and titles from an earlier system, i.e., "Kosmos," [82] "Basileus," [83] "Archon," etc. As Aristotle noted, Kosmos was a title of Cretan officials, and he equated this office with that of the Spartan Ephorate. The Kosmos may originally have had a sacred function: the word signifies order, arrangement, regularity, institution, discipline, and also the world, the universe, and mankind.

The text of the inscription from Dreros has been interpreted in secular terms, but the reference to the Kosmos being "useless as long as he lives" might well refer either to a ritual uselessness, or to his being "marked off" from the rest of humanity as a man with a foot in both worlds, the sacred and the profane. [84] The Spartan Ephors (elected by the assembly of Equals) had responsibilities which included the giving of permission to foreign ambassadors to cross the border into Spartan territory; permission to address the Spartan assembly; they were also responsible for summoning the assembly. They were the essential intermediaries between the Spartans and the outside world, functioning in much the same way as a priest or prophet: as a gate to the other (the etymology of ephor is probably epi horos: i.e., "on the frontier"). Xenophon [*Lak. Pol*. 13, 1-5] indicates some of the religious associations of the boundaries of the chora.

The polis appears to revolve around two central ideas: that of *assembly*, and that of *judgement* (in a wide sense, including "separation" and "balance"). From Plutarch's life of Theseus we can gather that the

assemblage was to be as large as possible, whether or not the synoikismos actually took place in this way:

> daring yet farther to enlarge the city, he invited all strangers to equal privileges in it: and the words "come hither, all ye people", are said to be the beginning of any proclamation which Theseus ordered.

Plutarch also tells us that:

> the nobility (selected by Theseus) were to have the care of religion, to supply the city with magistrates, to explain the laws and to interpret whatever related to the worship of the gods. As to the rest, he balanced the citizens against each other as nearly as possible; the nobles excelling in dignity, the husbandmen in usefulness, and the artificers in number...

(which recalls Plato's remarks about the distribution of equal plots of land: the actual size of the plot depended on its fertility. A good plot would be very small). This view of the polis makes it a moral universe, containing all good things in strict proportion, with all the people of Attica in communion with the king.

A fragment from the beginning of Aristotle's *Athenian Constitution* [no. 5] also points to the significance of total assemblage for the idea of the polis. He says that the Athenians:

> were grouped in four tribal divisions in imitation of the seasons of the year, and each of the tribes was divided into three parts, in order that there might be twelve parts in all, like the months of the year,

> and they were called thirds and brotherhoods; and the arrangement of clans was in groups of thirty to the brotherhood, as the days to the month, and the clan consisted of thirty men.

One can argue that the significance of the assembly of the citizens is that it makes council and judgement possible among the largest number of participants. But there may be a deeper reason behind the desire for the total synoikismos. The reason may be theological, involving the idea of completion. As Aristotle said of the polis, it is an *end*, and once it is reached it begins to serve an entirely different function, allowing the passage of the citizens from the world of subsistence to the world of the good life, the life of virtue. The polis can do this only because it is complete and has reached the limit of what it is: its completion marks it off from the rest of the world (with which it is contrasted on the shield of Achilles), so that it stands in relation to the world as does a priest or priest-king - *of* the world, but set *apart*.

The importance of the polis therefore, given the validity of this argument, was its completeness, so that it stood like a gate between the world of subsistence and a world of possibilities beyond; a place of transaction (hence commerce and the agora), both between man and man, and man and the divine. It served as the intermediary, as the point of exchange (hence the presence of strangers). Its completeness did not depend on particular buildings, institutions, and social arrangements, beyond the assembly and the principle of counsel, and so it was possible for the polis to be wherever the citizens (the free) happened to be.

The real polis, of course, was never like this: the average citizen's liberty and leisure to acquire virtue was never quite what Aristotle had in mind. The history of the polis, and its emergence into history, might be characterized as the struggle to be what it ought to have been, but never was.

Teotihuacan and the river of Mercury

An interesting article appeared in the Guardian in April 2015, telling us that liquid mercury had been found underneath a pyramid in Mexico.

Mexican researcher Sergio Gómez announced that he had discovered “large quantities” of liquid mercury in a chamber below the Pyramid of the Feathered Serpent, the third largest pyramid of Teotihuacan, the ruined city in central Mexico.

Gómez has spent six years slowly excavating the tunnel, which was unsealed in 2003 after 1,800 years. In November 2014, Gómez and a team announced they had found three chambers at the tunnel’s 300ft end, almost 60ft below the temple. Near the entrance of the chambers, they a found trove of strange artifacts: jade statues, jaguar remains, a box filled with carved shells and rubber balls.

On the 31st October last year, Scientific American reported on the press briefing given at the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City:

> ...archaeologists say that the new rooms contained thousands of objects, including carved statues, rubber balls, jade from Guatemala and a wooden box of shells. Beyond some traces of skin, however, no bodies have been discovered, although archaeologists have hypothesized that the site holds a burial chamber, perhaps still buried in the soil. “Just before the chambers is where we found very important offerings—a lot of them—alongside many objects," says Sergio Gomez.

After reminding us that mercury is toxic and devastating to the human body through prolonged exposure, the Guardian article tells us that:

> the liquid metal had no apparent practical purpose for ancient Mesoamericans. But it has been discovered at other sites. Rosemary Joyce, a professor of anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley, said that archaeologists have found mercury at three other sites, two Maya and one Olmec, around Central America.

What might the impractical purpose of the mercury be?

> The mercury may have symbolized an underworld river or lake, Gómez postulated, an idea that resonated with Annabeth Headrick, a professor at the University of Denver and the author of works on Teotihuacan and Mesoamerican art. The shimmering, reflective qualities of liquid mercury may have resembled “an underworld river, not that different from the river Styx,” Headrick said, “if only in the concept that it’s the entrance to the supernatural world and the entrance to the underworld.”

So, an 'underground river or lake' located beneath the pyramid, which may have had the symbolic function of serving as an entrance to the supernatural world, and/or an underworld. Why was this river represented by Mercury, rather than water? Annabeth Headrick is quoted as saying that “mirrors were considered a way to look into the supernatural world, they were a way to divine what might happen in the future,” she said. “It could be a sort of river, albeit a pretty spectacular one.” Rosemary Joyce says that the liquid mercury may have been regarded as “somewhat magical … there for ritual purposes or symbolic purposes.”

Lots of speculation so far. But the divinatory suggestion may well make sense. Two lines from a Neo-Assyrian cuneiform tablet in the British Museum come to mind, where Assurbanipal, in the course of describing his training for kingship, declares that:

> 14' I am versed with the portents of heaven and earth, I am praised in the assembly of scholars; 15' I discuss the liver, the mirror of heaven, with expert diviners.[85]

This rather curious passage also reflects the Greek view of the function of the liver, as discussed by Plato. It has always been a rather obscure notion for us to understand, since our modern experience gives us no clue as to why ancient civilizations regarded the liver as a mirror of heaven.

In both Greece and Assyria the heavens were understood to be an image of the divine. And as the divine was understood to be the source of all knowledge, the heavens were the ultimate source of human knowledge. And therefore they were the focus of much priestly and scholarly concern.

Divination by liver is common to a number of cultures, and the logic of the process may have been similar among them. But beyond what Plato says about it, we have little received knowledge of why the liver was chosen for this purpose. Plato argued that the liver reflected the reason. He also argued that knowledge of the moving image of eternity, the source of knowledge and reason, was held in the soul. That is what the soul is for, and is in a sense a model of eternity. It is what living creatures share in common with eternity.

The soul reflects knowledge of the heavens, and the liver reflects the reason and thought. The liver therefore has something of eternity about it

also.

We might imagine that the liver was understood to reflect what was in the human brain, which we regard as the seat of reason. In fact it was a widespread belief in antiquity that the liver was the seat of the soul. In which case the reason which was reflected by the liver was *the reason expressed in the heavens*.[86]

The actual practice of haruspicy involved examination of the form of the liver and its physical detail. We have depictions of the parts of the liver from Mesopotamia, in clay, and also from the Etruscans - the latter in the form of an annotated bronze model. The perfection and completion of the liver was what was important for the divination. As a consequence, the analysis of the liver depended on what was normal about the liver, and what was different.

Documents from the library of Ashurbanipal tell us how the liver was consulted. A question would be framed for the relevant divinity before the removal and examination of the liver from the ram. The condition of the liver would then provide the answer to the question.

We do in fact know at least one of the reasons why the liver was chosen for this divinatory purpose. Most of us encounter sheep's liver on a butcher’s shop counter, or in a delicatessen, where it appears red or reddish brown. And we imagine that is how it looks when it is first removed from a sheep's body. This isn't the case. Countless butchers and vets must have seen the liver close to the moment of death over the centuries, but not one of these observations appears ever to have reached a historian or classicist.

Thirty years ago the writer Robert Temple was curious enough about haruspicy to arrange with a local farmer to slaughter a sheep, in order to

understand the process from the practical side. He wrote about it in *Conversations with Eternity: Ancient Man's Attempts to Know the Future* (1984). He tell us that:

> the liver takes its position in the body from the support it gets from surrounding organs. It more or less 'floats'. But essentially the liver is shaped like a very large plano-convex lens. It the lamb were to stand on its hind legs, the convex surface of the liver would be uppermost.

Then he tells us what the liver looks like on removal from the body of a sheep or ram:

> The liver when removed from a freshly killed animal is extremely shiny and reflective; but it becomes dull as time elapses. This attribute of the liver was not lost on the ancients: there are many references to it as a 'mirror' in their literature. This led to all sorts of esoteric doctrines, and immeasurably added to the reputation of the liver as an arcane and highly special organ.

Plato gives an extraordinary account of the liver in his discussion of the constitution of the human body... he says that the gods placed it for its function as a mirror down into the bowels so that it might reflect the thoughts and images of the mind, bringing an improvement to the bestial part of man which is placed in the bottom of his guts.

Plato also says that:

> the authors of our being... placed in the liver the seat of divination.... Such is the nature of the liver, which is placed.... in order that it may give prophetic intimations. During the life of each individual these intimations are plainer, but after his death the liver becomes blind, and delivers oracles too obscure to be intelligible.

Of course it is much too soon to say what this fascinating discovery means, and European and near Eastern parallels may not hold any water at all in the Mesoamerican context. But it is interesting to speculate that the river or lake in the bowels of the earth beneath the pyramid served a divinatory function as a mirror of the heavens. Which is not to exclude other symbolic and ritual functions it may have had. I will be watching for further developments from this interesting excavation.

The Guardian article is at: http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/24/liquid-mercury-mexican-pyramid-teotihuacan

The Scientific American article is at: http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/new-artifact-filled-chambers-revealed-under-teotihuacan/

On the 6th of May 2015 I wrote an update on this article, pointing out that my attention had been drawn to:

the description of the mausoleum of the Chinese Emperor Qin, who ascended the throne in 246 BCE. The description of the mausoleum and its construction came from Sima Qian, in chapter 6 of his *Records of the Grand Historian*, which contains the biography of Qin Shi Huang.

The mausoleum was begun as soon as the Emperor ascended the throne, when he was only thirteen years old. Full-scale construction began after he had unified China in 221 BCE, after defeating six other Chinese states.

In the ninth month, the First Emperor was interred at Mount Li. When the First Emperor first came to the throne, the digging and preparation work began at Mount Li. Later, when he had unified his empire, 700,000 men

were sent there from all over his empire. They dug through three layers of groundwater, and poured in bronze for the outer coffin. Palaces and scenic towers for a hundred officials were constructed, and the tomb was filled with rare artifacts and wonderful treasure. Craftsmen were ordered to make crossbows and arrows primed to shoot at anyone who enters the tomb.

That's pure Indiana Jones! This account may be part of the reason why the Chinese archaeologists are leaving the excavation of the mausoleum till last. Immediately following this description by Sima Qian, is the passage relevant to the Pyramid of the Feathered Serpent, the third largest pyramid of Teotihuacan, where it states that:

> Mercury was used to simulate the hundred rivers,
> the Yangtze and Yellow River, and the great sea, and set to flow mechanically. Above were representation of the heavenly constellations, below, the features of the land. Candles were made from fat of "man-fish", which is calculated to burn and not extinguish for a long time.

So Mercury was used to represent the rivers and the sea. And the heavens were represented above it, as I suggested might be the case in Teotihuacan. The account concludes chillingly by mentioning that many of the concubines 'accompanied the dead', and that after the funerary ceremonies were over, the workers and craftsmen were buried alive inside the complex:

The Second Emperor said: "It would be inappropriate for the concubines of the late emperor who have no sons to be out free", ordered that they

should accompany the dead, and a great many died. After the burial, it was suggested that it would be a serious breach if the craftsmen who constructed the mechanical devices and knew of its treasures were to divulge those secrets. Therefore after the funeral ceremonies had completed and the treasures hidden away, the inner passageway was blocked, and the outer gate lowered, immediately trapping all the workers and craftsmen inside. None could escape. Trees and vegetations were then planted on the tomb mound such that it resembles a hill. [87]

Beyond the Religious Impulse

Millions of words have been written on the subject of human religion, and its origin, in the past two centuries or so. These words have been written in an intellectual and cultural landscape, in the western world at least, that has a very clearly defined structure. This means that each new writer on the subject of religion has had to negotiate these, while framing arguments which add to the sum of human knowledge, and which make sense of the data which is available to us.

The discipline of archaeology has given us a treasure trove of data which we did not have even a century ago, so that it is possible for us to analyse the past to a level of detail which can be quite revealing. Many of the things understood and believed by scholars in the nineteenth century have lost all value, except in terms of way markers in the development of a rational response to the evidence for the past.

The archaeologist James Mellaart, who was brilliant, but who did not entirely have the confidence of other scholars for one reason and another, once said in a lecture that ‘the important bit of evidence is always missing’. Meaning that there is no reason at all why the simple act of digging should provide materials which answer the questions you want to ask.

It is also true that the important bit of evidence is sometimes present, but often isn’t recognised, because the scholar is asking the wrong questions, and possibly asking questions within the wrong analytical paradigm. So there is in fact a very large quantity of material available to scholars which can tell us much about the intellectual life of the ancient world, but because of the contemporary intellectual and cultural landscape, with its

fixed and defined structure developed over many years, it simply cannot be seen for what it is.

The most common explanation for the human insistence on the reality of the divine, and its long existence, stretching as it does, back (at least) into the Palaeolithic, if rock art is any guide, is that it is an intuitive and natural response to the nature of the reality which presents itself to man. That is undoubtedly part of the explanation, but it has an enormous weakness, in that there is nothing about this response which offers an explanation of any of the complexity of human religious observance and understanding. Of that we have only a phenomenological understanding; we can describe the phenomena represented to us in the evidence of texts and ritual objects, burial sites, temples, etc, and we can infer certain things about the ancient perception of reality, and of the nature of the divine, on the basis of these, usually within a comparative framework.

Analysis of a phenomenon within a comparative framework is always hazardous, because it is necessary to determine what is comparable. It may be the case that apparent parallels are simply phenomenal coincidences, without any deeper common meaning, and so the comparison is misleading. The comparative choices, and the nature of the decisions made in connection with them, have bedevilled comparative study of ancient patterns of thought concerning the divine since modern comparative study began. I remember the archaeologist Mike Parker Pearson's confidence in interpreting the monument of Stonehenge as a place of the dead early in the first decade of this new century. He interpreted the routes to the monument, by water and land, as a processional route from some formerly existing and similar monuments made of wood (Durrington Walls and Woodhenge), and read from the

whole array that the processional route symbolised passing from life to death.

This easy interpretation even sounds as though it belongs to the late nineteenth century, in its approach and assumptions. Why was he so confident of his interpretation? The answer is that he had met someone from Madagascar, where they have stone structures too, who told him that stone monuments are places of the dead.

So many questions could be asked! Why should practice and meaning in Madagascar be comparable with practice and meaning in Stonehenge? How does the Madagascan know about the meaning of stone monuments in Madagascar – is it still a current practice, and therefore it is possible to ask people what it means? If it is a current practice, why should it be the case that it reflects an earlier understanding of what it might have meant to build these things some four thousand years ago? If it isn't a current practice, then what basis is there *at all* for conjuring an interpretation from the stones which is then used to interpret the meaning of Stonehenge?

Underneath this interpretation is the unpleasant notion that the strangeness of the ancient world arises from an essentially irrational view of reality, which we do not share because we are rational creatures (in this case a post-processual academic archaeologist of some standing). If we want to gain an insight into irrational phenomena, we need to find someone to ask who might still be in touch, in some way, with an understanding of that irrationality.

Scholars are looking for a simple set of solutions to the question of the origin of the religious impulse, because we imagine it must be simple. It is after all a universal phenomenon which has existed almost from time

immemorial. But it isn't the case that the set of solutions needs to be simple. It does however need to have been *intelligible* to the group which first mooted the idea of the divine, as does the idea of connection between man and the divine. Not everyone needs to understand the actual detail of how god was first understood by man, and the nature of the basis of the idea that man can have some kind of connection with the divine. What is necessary is the existence of such ideas. Human beings will do the rest.

So much of modern life depends on things we don't understand in any real sense – technology, as Arthur C. Clarke once pointed out, if sufficiently advanced, is indistinguishable from magic. But we are able to live our lives on the basis of the knowledge of the functionality of our technology. The function of computers, phones, cameras and televisions is deliberately made simple, otherwise we would not know how to use them, or perhaps even understand how they might be of use to us. When I was a child of about six or seven, I was taught how to count in binary, and also taught how to draw flow diagrams. This was because at the time (the early sixties), this was the sort of knowledge it was imagined would be necessary for people to be able to use computers in the future. Which turned out to be wrong. I've had occasion to use this knowledge (rarely), only because I've worked professionally in the development of information technology. Very few people outside this relatively narrow group of techno-priests have any idea at all of the practical workings of the technologies they use.

What we identify as the religious impulse is what is phenomenally observed by us, both in the present, and also in the archaeological and literary record, where it takes some very strange forms. This evidence does not give us clear explanation of why our ancestors conceived of both the idea of the divine, and the idea that some sort of human-divine commerce

could take place. In the absence of such a clear explanation, we follow the line of least resistance, and assume that the explanation lies in the credulity of the human mind, and that therefore what lies beneath the phenomena we observe is essentially irrational. On this basis, it is hard for scholars to see the history of religions as anything other than an interminable procession of human foolishness through time.

Yet there are many people for whom the human response to the divine is still more important to them than anything else that civilisation has made. They do not know why things are as they imagine them to be, but at some level, the notion of the divine makes profound sense. They need to live their lives in relation to the observance of the reality of God.

Much of *The Sacred History of Being* is an exploration of a hypothesized noumenal core of rational ideas about the nature of the divine, which also provides explanation for the idea that the divine and the world of time and space are in some way interwoven. This hypothesized noumenal core, and its nature, I inferred from surviving discussion which took place in antiquity, and close examination of the detail of ancient liturgy, ritual, and art. Some of the evidence is not obscure, and has been in circulation for a very long time, including materials which appear in the Old and New Testaments. It simply isn't seen for what it is. Other evidence comes from Mesopotamian texts, particularly from ancient Assyria.

Rational argument provides a basis for both the nature and reality of the divine, and also for the existence of connexion between the divine and the secular world. We have this discussion first from the middle of the 1st millennium BCE. In the place where the argument is made most explicitly, the conclusion to the discussion is not given. This is to be expected, since it represents an esoteric core of understanding of reality, and therefore a

matter of great importance to any group who had religious doctrine built upon it. The nature of the conclusion is profoundly counter-intuitive, which is another reason why only the reasoning was given, and not the conclusion. But it can be figured out.

This counter-intuitive conclusion implies some extraordinary things about the nature of reality in general, and about the nature of material existence. The most striking thing is how closely the implications of this conclusion mirror known models of reality which have been in circulation in various parts of the world since the 2nd millennium BCE.

It is possible to extrapolate from the implications of this argument some things which would have become a focus of special interest to any priestly group who followed the logic of this kind of argument about the nature of reality. *The Sacred History of Being* discusses both the nature of the divine which emerges as a consequence of this argument, and its implications for the relationship between the divine and the world, plus the mechanics of the kind of interaction which can be predicted to take place. In addition, it is possible to specify particular aspects of the world of existence which have the most powerful resonance with the divine world. Some of these were already known on the basis of the observance of these phenomena by ancient societies, but it wasn't clear why they were accorded such importance.

Now it is possible to focus also on similar resonances, which might not already have been noticed. So the hypothesis has turned into a (so far tentative) reconstruction of a view of the world which was in existence around the Mediterranean and in the ancient near east in the 1st millennium at least, and most likely also in the 2nd millennium. This model is capable of making predictions about what may be found in the evidence,

and can also be falsified on the basis of whether or not it is supported by the evidence.

Frazer and the Association of Ideas

In the 1980s, I read the two-volume version of *The Golden Bough*, miraculously reduced from thirteen volumes by the expedient of removing all the footnotes, and was struck by the absence of any discussion of a relationship between magical patterns of thought and ideas of divinity and Being. I knew about the existence of this relationship principally from an interest in Platonism in the European Renaissance. But there was a puzzling absence of discussion of these ideas. In *The Golden Bough,* patterns of magical thought are discussed in terms of the *association of ideas*; as a phenomenon of human thought, rather than as something which is a corollary of a model of reality.

Frazer was a disciple of John Locke, who originated the idea of the association of ideas, and he understood the functioning of the human mind in such terms. His earlier criticism of Plato is largely along the lines that, since he did not have this understanding of the nature of mind, he mistakenly converted an epistemology into an ontology. Since having the capacity to think of a thing and give it a name, does not give it reality, Plato had made a fundamental error.

Frazer also shared Locke's interest in the progress of man, and imagined that the technical and industrial production of the British Empire represented how far the human race had come. Philosophy for Frazer was about practical things. It is clear in the text of *The Golden Bough* that the idea of progress was seen by him in two ways - he drew a parallel between the gulf between the ideas of the ancients and of

modern man, and the social and intellectual conditions in contemporary society, where the intellectual difference between those at the top and those at the bottom was likely to be just as great. In both cases, we should find frightful things, if we dig down deep.

Finding and providing explanations for both the existence and the nature of those frightful things was a major part of his work. He wanted to put unbridgeable distance between ourselves, the inheritors of enlightenment rationalism, and the ancient cultures whose ways of understanding the world were based on intellectual error. And that intellectual error he in part explained in *The Golden Bough*, treating magical thought entirely in terms of ideas of sympathy and contagion, or the faulty association of ideas in the ancient mind.

Did Frazer not know about the relationship between magic and the idea of Being? He was extremely well read, as his work testifies, so this is hard to believe. He also wrote a study of Plato's work early in his career, which will be discussed a little later in this chapter.

Leaving out of *The Golden Bough* any consideration of the idea of magic as something whose nature depended on the nature of Being was a choice he made. It was not a choice forced on him by the evidence.

In writing *The Golden Bough* Frazer was transforming ancient thought about the world and its underlying reality into examples of intellectual error, and by the parallels he made with 'savage' thought, through his definition of magic, he sealed the case against the thought of the

ancient world. Frazer did this by writing a thirteen-volume implicit denial that magic *had ever been* an idea associated with the idea of Being. Though the elephant in the room (Being) was never directly discussed.

The agenda of the classicists from the outset of the (mainly German) professionalization of the discipline in the middle of the eighteenth century, was, in part, to recast the significance of classical Greece, and classical thought. They wanted to render Greek civilization as something distinctly European, and not something belonging to the cultural orbit of the east. This meant a purification of sorts, an alchemical transformation of the cultural realities in classical Greece.

This purification necessarily involved a degree of fabrication, a falsification of the actual nature of Classical Greece. Aspects of the history of this falsification were discussed in Martin Bernal's *Black Athena* of 1987, which had the word 'fabrication' in the subtitle. A large number of features of classical civilization could not be outright denied, since they were very common in the body of evidence. The worship of divine statues could not be questioned or denied; sacrifice was a regular feature of importance in public and private life, performed at every important juncture. Magic likewise, was a feature of ancient life at all levels of society.

However classical civilization could be purified in part by changing the interpretation of how these things came to have significance to the ancient Greeks. The answer was plain: the Greeks were prone to a degree of irrationality in their public and private lives. So, the divine statue of a god as a place inhabited by the divine was a mistake, possibly the result of failing to distinguish between the image of a

thing, and the thing itself. The idea of the reality of the plethora of gods themselves was also a mistake, where the Greeks converted ideas of natural forces and powers into personifications of these things. Likewise, all the other strange practices could be ascribed to an irrationality, a primitive stupidity, for which the Germans have a very ugly word.

Frazer was a late contributor to this process of purification. But in writing *The Golden Bough,* he applied Locke's theory of the association of ideas to the relatively new subject of anthropology. So, the strange beliefs were ascribed to a failure to distinguish between things which had the appearance of similarity, but were in fact different, or to a mistaken notion of contagion, in which things which were once in contact, are understood to be still in contact (the lock of hair, the parings of fingernails, etc.)

All ritual action throughout history could thus be explained as intellectual error, along with the very idea of the sacred. Even now, patterns of behaviour and belief are understood by anthropologists in terms of the product of intellectual associations, which may be the outcome of local cultural social dynamics, or even some kind of pathological response to the world. They aren't looking for a rational explanation for ritual and sacred phenomena arising from an idea of Being.

By the process of purification, it became possible to argue that the real achievement of the Greeks could be understood in terms of the quality of their philosophical thought; and the interpretation of their sculpture, along with their architecture, in terms of aesthetics and proportion. Their literature and language could be appreciated in

terms of style. All of which could be approached with minimal taint from the irrationality of other aspects of Greek culture.

Most readers of Frazer read *The Golden Bough*, and none of his other writings. At the time, I knew of no other works. I wondered what else he had written, and if he had perhaps discussed the idea in another book. In which case, the omission of a discussion of Being in the *Golden Bough* might be explained. Since I'm discussing thoughts about Frazer which occurred to me in 1987, there was no internet to search, so I did a trawl through his publications in the catalogue of the National Library of Scotland (I was living in Edinburgh at the time).

And there it was in the catalogue: *The Growth of Plato's Ideal Theory*. A slim book emerged shortly afterwards from the stacks, first published in 1930, close to the end of his long career.

Frazer wrote this text as an essay in 1879, to compete for a fellowship at Cambridge. He won, and it is not surprising that he did. The essay is an extraordinary piece of work, and a tour-de-force by a twenty-four year old. It was clear from a cursory study of it that he knew the texts of Plato inside out.

Plato of course represents the nominal beginning of the articulate discussion of Being in the western tradition. Frazer certainly did know something of the history of the idea of Being, and the importance it formerly had in the ancient world. And long before he began to write *The Golden Bough*.

The mystery had deepened. He knew Plato's arguments about Being and the importance of these for a philosophical understanding of the world. And he also knew, or should have known, that Plato had defined two different kinds of magic in the *Laws*, one of which was explicitly drawn from the idea of Being itself. He ought to have noticed the crucial passage (XI, 933), where Plato clearly distinguishes between two levels of magic, and the penalties for each:

> ...it is not easy to know the nature of all these things; nor if a man do know can he readily persuade others to believe him. And when men are disturbed in their minds at the sight of waxen images fixed either at their doors, or in a place where three ways meet, or upon the sepulchres of parents, there is no use trying to persuade them that they should despise all such things because they have no certain knowledge about them... he who attempts to... enchant others knows not what he is doing... unless he happens to be a prophet or diviner.

There are three major themes in Frazer's essay. The first of these themes is how the human mind understands objects and ideas which are presented to it. As a disciple of John Locke, he understood human thought in terms of the association of ideas, which was one of Locke's major contributions to philosophy. As a consequence, when Plato spoke of 'Being' and related concepts, Frazer understood him to be falsely imagining that, what he could conceive of, therefore had some kind of objective reality; he was converting a discursive epistemology into a false ontology. Plato made this 'mistake' over and over again.

A second major theme of Frazer's essay is the notion that Plato did not have a logically coherent and doctrinal definition of Being at the time he was writing his dialogues. Hence, the apparent changes in Plato's point of view when dealing with questions concerning ultimate reality, can be explained in terms of a process of development. In short, he changed his mind, according to where he was in terms of his intellectual progress. As a result, much of Frazer's essay is critically concerned with the contemporary discussion of the order in which the dialogues were composed. This order was supposed to be established on the basis of style, and the sequence in which various questions in the dialogues were discussed and apparently dismissed. One of these questions involved the plausibility or otherwise of what Frazer called 'Plato's Ideal Theory' (his theory of the Forms). Then as now this procedure was inconclusive, and the order of dialogues proposed by Frazer is as problematic and unconvincing as any other which has been proposed.

The third theme does not occupy much space in his essay, since his conclusion is that the whole subject of the idea of Being is not worth discussing, since, as he says, 'nothing can be predicated of Being'.

This is a staggering assertion, given the amount of words which have been written on the idea of Being over the past two and a half thousand years. Frazer takes his cue for this both from Locke's doctrine of the association of ideas, and from the apparently unresolved questions about Being which appear in the Platonic dialogues. For Frazer, there is simply nothing to say on the question of the reality of Being.

This nearly clears up the mystery. But it leaves us with another mystery. It is one thing to come to the conclusion that nothing sensible can be said about the nature of Being; it is another to then entirely ignore the discussions about Being which had been taking place across the entire period of time covered by *The Golden Bough*, and also to ignore the fact that the nature of Being had in the past been understood to underpin ideas about magic and religion.

Not only did he not engage with these ideas, he wrote about the human race *as if there never had been* an idea of Being in support of the phenomenal aspects of human culture.

The consequence of this is that, for more than forty years, what Frazer was writing was a species of literary fiction, resulting from a Lockean reinterpretation of the evidence. Thus, *The Golden Bough* is essentially a study of human culture, *with one of its most important and perennial features written out*, and replaced with another understanding of how things came to have meaning: the idea that the vastness of human experience was, for the most part, built on mistaken notions of sympathy and contagion.

My first book, *The Sacred History of Being*, is in part a response to the writing out of this important aspect of human culture by Frazer, and those who came after, and focusses on the role of the idea of Being, or Reality itself, and what could be said of it; in Classical Athens, in archaic Greece, in Israel, and also in Ancient Assyria. The arguments were similar in each of these places, though beyond the culture of Greece, we often know this only

indirectly, through literary themes, images, tropes, ritual texts, and iconography. It is a critical reconstruction of our intellectual history since the middle of the 2nd Millennium B.C.E.

Aristotle's Four Causes

Almost all modern discussions of the telos (where these exist) derive ultimately from Aristotle's consideration of the subject. The telos and the final cause he discussed as part of a suite of explanation for why things are the way they are. The final cause, the end to which something is moving, or what it is that has caused it to begin to move, is part of the explanation of why it is the way it is, why it is composed of the elements it has, why it is configured as it is, why it is functioning in the manner in which it does, why it has certain inclinations and appetites, and so on.

The other components of the suite are the formal cause, the efficient cause, and the material cause. These should not be regarded as wholly distinct in character from the final cause as modes of explanation, since they depend on the same underlying idea. Understanding the other kinds of cause actually helps us to understand the idea of the final cause, and so these causes will be discussed also.

Aristotle used the image of the house (oikos) to help illustrate the idea of the telos, though it is not a particularly good example with which to discuss this philosophical idea. The house is something which is built in order to achieve certain things: it has a final form, which, when reached, allows it to be called a house. It is composed of certain things, and when these are assembled and arranged in the proper order, the house is complete. Before it is assembled and its elements are arranged in the proper order, the house has only a potential existence. It might come to be, and will only make sense when it does come to be, but unassembled it has no existence.

In modern times, the only cause we allow (at least in terms of 'cause') is the efficient cause. In other words, the direct action of constructing the house and its elements – the labour of making the bricks, cutting the timbers, erecting the frame, putting on the roof tiles, etc. It is about work and energy: the kilojoules of effort necessary to complete the task

The other causes make more difficulties for the moderns. The formal cause seems to be drawn from another realm of explanation altogether, since it seems to imply that like gives rise to like. Thus, a human being gives birth to a human being, and a lion gives birth to lions. This is probably the origin of the idea of formal cause. In the context of the construction of a house, this mode of explanation has to be reshaped considerably. Thus, a brick-maker is the creator and formal cause of the bricks which go to make up most of the fabric of the house. And likewise, the baker is the formal cause of bread. In both these examples, it is obvious that the craftsmen are also the source of the work involved in the making of bricks and bread.

It is interesting to speculate that this very simple mode of explanation lies behind the creation of a large number of craft gods – when the human race began to engage in the creation of things other than offspring, this simple rule would necessarily be augmented to include human handiwork. The augmented explanation requires that the brick-maker, the baker, the weaver, be agents or vessels of the formal cause of each of the crafts. And so they become emblematic of their crafts in the abstract. In ancient Assyria, a number of religious officials had titles which were craft related, and the training of the crown prince for his future kingship involved the

development of skills in various crafts ('with the bakers did the baking' which we find in the annals of Ashurbanipal, who became king of Assyria in the late 7th century BCE).

Before the Classical period in Greece, we have no evidence for the discussion of the four causes as causes. This absence of evidence however is not evidence for the absence of the causes as explanatory modes. For example, the four causes underpin the scene in Book xviii of the Iliad, where Hephaestus is working metal to create statues animated by the gods. He is a craftsman, and is depicted as highly energetic in the practice of his craft. Some of the objects he makes are *by the very nature of their design* able to enter the councils of the gods, and to return of their own accord. So, the final cause (the telos), efficient cause, material cause, and the formal cause are all implicit in this scene.

Three of the four causes which refer to processes (the telos, the efficient and the formal cause) are implicitly attested often in the cultural record. The telos or the end is a common concept in ancient Greece, Egypt and Mesopotamia, most often expressed in the context of mythological, religious and theological texts ('the King is in his Horizon' is a not uncommon trope in Ancient Egypt). Both the material and efficient causes are ideas which have to be clearly known to any culture which has to muster, organise and calculate manpower and effort, and material resources. Also, the organisation of agriculture, metalwork, glassmaking, breadmaking, weaving, and the other crafts. The fourth, the material cause, is also implicitly present in ancient writings, since the function of a thing is largely co-terminous with both the material with which it is made,

and the form after which it is modelled. All these things were part of the responsibility of kings in the ancient Near East and Egypt, and elsewhere.

Since much of the activity in the ancient world is about the amassing of materials, the creation of precious and sacred objects, the organisation of work, and the ritualised association of things created by means of the first three of the causes, with the fourth, the telos, or what is divine, we can see the material, the formal, the efficient and the final cause in nearly all aspects of ancient civilisation.

These causes were understood, in essence as outlined by Aristotle, long before his time. We do not need to find texts in Assyria or Egypt which discuss these causes in the way that Aristotle did. We will not find them, because the structure of society was different in those places, with a much more stratified nature, with knowledge and esoteric thought at the top of the structure. Explanation was rarely written down (though ritual and liturgy sometimes were). Instead, we need to interpret the evidence which is presented to us in order to understand what is actually there to be seen.

Of the four causes, only the final cause absolutely requires philosophical insight for its understanding. Hence the idea of the final cause is the most interesting from the point of view of developing an understanding of the world of ideas in antiquity: if the idea of the telos is present, *then philosophical discussion of the nature of reality is also present*. The idea of the telos makes no sense unless it is understood, and it presents a number of problems for anyone attempting to understand the concept. Gaining

understanding, and the solving of logical problems, is what philosophy was all about.

Cultural Parallels and False Narratives

I treat much of our intellectual and cultural baggage as contingent, meaning that it can and should be questioned. It isn't necessarily real, or grounded, and it may be as mythical as the main subject in question. So it is necessary to look at that too, because it may be part of a supporting narrative, without which the main subject may have a quite different meaning.

For example, when looking at ancient societies such as Greece and Assyria, we talk about their culture in terms which make sense to us. For example we may talk of Greek religion, and be entirely unaware that the concept is problematic. It is problematic because the Greeks did not have 'religion'. The term acquired its current usage through the writings of St. Augustine, around the time of the fall of the Western Roman Empire. To talk of Greek cultic life in terms of 'religion' is therefore to be using a problematic notion which took form around nine centuries after the high point of Greek civilization.

Gilbert Murray wrote a famous work called 'The Four Stages of Greek Religion'. Sometime later, and after much further thought, the book was revised with an extra chapter, and titled 'The Five Stages of Greek Religion'. So not only is the entire analysis based on a subjective and conceptual retrojection of a much later idea, the meaning of the evidence has been divided in two different ways according to what was in Murray's mind at different times in his scholarly career.

What Murray was trying to do was to put his concept of ancient Greek religion into a framework of historical and intellectual development, and to provide a narrative for its progress. That's what historians did with their

materials in 1925, and a glance at modern histories of human cultural and intellectual development will show that not much has changed. There are pitfalls that have swallowed the reputations and reliability of earlier historians, and modern historians cautiously avoid these. But they are playing essentially the same game. It can be argued that it is hard to avoid constructing such narratives when dealing with the evidence. It is indeed difficult to avoid this. But the difficulty involved in dealing with the evidence and its context is not an excuse for superficial and largely subjective analysis.

It can also be argued by historians that 'we know what we mean' when terms such as religion are used in the analysis of earlier contexts. They may well know what they mean, in terms of how the word might be used in the context of modern European culture and modern history. The assumption is made that using it to analyse what is understood to be a parallel cultural phenomenon in the ancient world is therefore legitimate, and not hazardous.

Are we dealing with 'parallel cultural phenomena'? We understand what we already know, and this knowledge allows us to identify cultural parallels in other contexts and times, and therefore to explore the phenomena we are looking at in a rational way.

But sometimes there was no word for what we understand as the cultural phenomenon of religion in antiquity, and therefore there was, sometimes no understanding *then*, of what we think we understand *now*. It follows that, either the understanding of what we call 'religion' in the ancient past was significantly different from our own, or the terminology we use in our own culture is actually unnecessary.

So, if we did not use the term 'religion' to discuss 'religious' phenomena in our own world and time, such as the Abrahamic religions, or Buddhism, Taoism, and Hindu patterns of understanding, what would or could we understand of these phenomena?

We could say quite a lot in fact. But it would start to paint for us a different picture of our world.

What we would be missing would be a formal term which we use to indicate that a significant cultural grouping is bound together or unified by a doctrine, a text, liturgy, a cult of worship of the divine, an organised understanding of the world, an affiliation to a body of belief, a shared faith in another world, an eschatology, an organised priesthood, and so on.

The term 'religio', can be traced back to the mid-first century B.C.E., in the writings of Cicero. There is no universally accepted definition of what it means, or even its derivation. St Augustine defined it differently, on the basis of an interpretation by Lactantius. Augustine's is the most commonly agreed derivation, from the Latin 'religare', which means 'to bind together'.

There is a Wikipedia page on the word 'religio' which is rather good (not by me!), and reveals just how much weight we put on the modern derivations from this word. I'm going to quote from it a lot. It begins with this passage.

> The Latin term religiō, origin of the modern lexeme religion (via Old French/Middle … is of ultimately obscure etymology. It is recorded beginning in the 1st century BC, i.e. in Classical Latin at the beginning of the Roman Empire, notably by Cicero, in the sense of "scrupulous or strict observance of the traditional cultus".

On the etymology, the article continues:

> The classical explanation of the word, traced to Cicero himself, derives it from re- (again) + lego in the sense of "choose", "go over again" or "consider carefully". Modern scholars such as Tom Harpur and Joseph Campbell favor the derivation from ligo "bind, connect", probably from a prefixed re-ligare, i.e. re- (again) + ligare or "to reconnect," which was made prominent by St. Augustine, following the interpretation of Lactantius.

The problem with these etymologies, regardless of whether one favours lego or ligo, is that the now-familiar prefix re- "again" is not attested prior to its occurrence in religio and is itself in need of an etymological explanation. For this reason, it has been suggested that this productive prefix originates in the very word religio, where it arose by dissimilation of an earlier reduplicated *le-ligare, thence as it were *le-ligio.

So, we find we are reading both backwards, and also forwards, into our own time, when we try to discover something like the original sense of the word. We can't easily understand the word at this immense distance, when the word was scarcely understood (it would appear) in Republican Rome.

As I've indicated in my chapter ‘The Divine and the Limit’, there was a body of ideas in Rome which associated properties and attributes of things in the physical world with the Divine. These were often reduplicated in the same place, as if by doing this the connection with the Divine would be reinforced. The Wikipedia article on 'religio' observes that:

> Within the system of what we would now call "Roman religion (in the modern sense of the word), the term religio originally meant an obligation to the gods, something expected by them from human beings or a matter of particular care or concern as related to the

> gods, "reverence for God or the gods, careful pondering of divine things, piety".

In this sense, religio might be translated better as "religious scruple" than with the English word "religion". One definition of religion offered by Cicero is cultus deorum, "the proper performance of rites in veneration of the gods."

That shows some good understanding. The scholar Simon Price understood very well that it was the matter of observance which was the most important thing in Roman religion, not what people believed. The idea of belief is a retrojection into a foreign context, and is something which we *assume* was always present in connection with religion.

> Religio among the Romans was not based on "faith", but on knowledge, including - and especially - correct practice. Religio (plural religiones) was the pious practice of Rome's traditional cults, and was a cornerstone of the mos maiorum, the traditional social norms that regulated public, private, and military life. To the Romans, their success was self-evidently due to their practice of proper, respectful religio, which gave the gods what was owed them and which was rewarded with social harmony, peace and prosperity.

Again, a good understanding. It is observance of the gods and their rites, and knowledge of their properties and attributes which serve the functions of the cult. Belief or faith serves no function.

So, in important ways, modern understanding of the idea of religion is a real hindrance to an understanding of the concept in its original context: we ought to be talking in terms of cult observance.

Of course, modern religions have cultic aspects to them, and involve cult practices which are of great importance. But imagine trying to explain something like the Church of England or the Roman Catholic Church in terms of their performance of cult action.

We are misled about ancient religion by our presumption of an understanding of our own, and this misunderstanding of ancient religion magnifies our difficulty in maintaining that they are parallel cultural phenomena.

One of the ways in which we might understand something of the nature of ancient religions is to look at one which was around in antiquity, and which is still around. Hinduism has been around for a very long time, and its numerous sects and schools reflect something of the cultic organisation in both Greece and Rome.

The role of temples in Indian civilisation was explained by the Paramacharya of Kanchi Kamakoti Pitham, Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati Swamigal, in an interview in 1959. I'm quoting from an excellent article in the magazine *India Facts*: 'Temples and the State in India: A Historical Overview', written by M D Srinivas, and published on the 9th of September 2015. Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati Swamigal tells us that:

> Our temples are not organised as places for meditation, nor for congregational worship. The purpose of a temple is different. We enjoy the goods of life, such as house, food clothing, ornaments, music, dance, etc. We pay a tribute in the form of taxes to the King – now the Government – for making it possible for us to enjoy them by giving us their protection. The King Protector is provided with a palace and other paraphernalia of royalty.

> Even as we render homage to the kings for the enjoyment of these things, we are bound to tender our gratitude to God who has primarily given us the good things of life. We offer a part of these good things as a token of our gratitude to Him in the temple. We first offer to Him all that he has given to us, in the shape of food, clothing, jewels, music, flowers, lights, incense, and so on with the grateful consciousness that they are His gifts to us; and we receive them back from Him as His prasada.
>
> The temple is the place where these offerings are made on behalf of the collective community where it is situated. Even if people do not go to the temple, it is enough that these offerings are made to God on behalf of the community. The duty of the people at the place is to see that these offerings are made in a proper manner. There have been people who would not take a day's meal till the temple bell announced that the offering to God of food for the day had been made. Then only do they take their meal as God's prasada.

He is also quoted as saying:

> No other religion is known to have lasted so long. When I think of our religion I am reminded of our temples. They are not kept as clean as the churches or mosques…. Our sanctuaries are different because they are built of granite. Their foundations laid thousands of years ago still remain sturdy. … These temples still stand as great monuments to our civilization in spite of our neglect of them and our indifference. It is not easy to pull them down. Perhaps it is more difficult to demolish these edifices than it must have been to build them. Our religion, to repeat, is like these temples. It is being supported by something that we do not seem to know, something

> that is not present in other faiths… This something is varnashrama dharma.

He is referring to the Hindu model of the world, and specifically the duties performed according to the system of four varnas (social divisions) and four ashrams (stages in life). This system is imagined to be a natural part of the world.

M D Srinivas reminds us that,

> From ancient times, the classical texts of India have enjoined that one should not stay in a place which is not sanctified by the presence of a deity.

Arthur Koestler, who was the original interviewer of Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati Swamigal, published it in his *The Lotus and the Robot*, in 1960.[88] We get some crucial further details from this important interview. Koestler brought up the issue of "din and noise in Indian temples." Koestler wanted to know whether this was the "reason why Indians with a meditative disposition had to resort to the solitude of the mountains or bury themselves in lonely caves."

The Paramacharya begins his answer by saying, "The case is just the reverse. Because solitude and a secluded spot have been prescribed from the oldest times, for contemplation, the temples do not have to serve that purpose."

Now that is a good cultural parallel for ancient Greek and Roman religion. Faith is mentioned, but not belief (I've distinguished between these two things elsewhere). The reason it isn't mentioned is because *belief serves no function*. Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati Swamigal tells us exactly what the temples are for, and they are places of observance of the rites proper

to the gods, properly conducted, and that the buildings are the houses and palaces of the deities. The offerings are in response to the idea that all good things came from God. Note that he refers to God in the *singular*, and not as a plurality. God is accessed through the properties and attributes of the plurality of gods, and the rites and observances which are appropriate to them.

If the offerings are a symbolic return of good things to the God who gave them, then it is the case that the ritual activity in the Hindu religion is a deliberate recollection of the original creation and ordering of the universe. The activity and the meaning of the temples, the worship of statues of the Hindu divinities, and the temple system, are understood to function as a recreation of conditions close to the inception of the world, when all good things were granted to the human race. By performing these rites and observances, the reality of the world and its proper order is upheld.

This is strikingly like patterns of thought which are found in ancient Sumer, Assyria and Babylonia. In the latter two cases, the recollection of the conditions of the original creation is a key part of the installation of the gods in the temples, and can be seen to lie beneath the performance of the liturgy of the New Year Festival in Babylon (one of the chapters in the *Sacred History of Being* concerns aspects of this liturgy, the *Enuma Elish*). The important things which relate to the creation are collected together, and serve to establish the relationship with the Divine. By virtue of their collection together in the context of the temple, the Divine is brought closer, and into the physical world.

This pattern of ideas also applies to the cultic life of Greece and Rome, though it is not expressed in the same way as in India; and in the case of Rome, we have lost the reasons for some of its peculiarities (the role of Janus for instance, who seems sometimes to be the most important of the Roman gods).

But we are closer to understanding the problematic aspects of Roman religion, and the original meaning of the term 'religio', than we might think.

As already discussed, historians proceed by establishing parallels between cultural phenomena where they can, and build an understanding of a thing which might be quite different in detail from what is already understood. If what is known is actually understood. If it isn't understood, then confusion and misunderstanding will follow. That is what has happened with our understanding of 'religio' as anciently conceived.

Not understanding the concepts behind religious practice and observance, scholars fell back on what was, to them, the most likely meaning of the term. They assumed, as we have seen, that the meaning of the term could be understood in terms of 'religare', which means something like 'to bind again'. Despite the history of the Latin language making this understanding very unlikely, since the prefix 're-' is not attested in early writings as meaning 'to repeat'. So religare is, both in terms of definition and etymology, a poor candidate for aiding our understanding of 'religio'.

If they had possessed a better understanding of the concepts and reasons underpinning Cicero's 'cultus deorum' in the ancient world, (which in a sense is to beg the question) they would have spotted a similar Latin word, which retained something of the original meaning of 'religio'. That word is 'religere', which means 'to collect, or gather together'.

Plato's Point of View

One of the greatest barriers to the understanding of Plato is that he is writing from a perspective quite different from our own. I say 'our own', because this perspective can be clearly defined as something which we, in our cultural continuum, implicitly accept (even if a number of individuals in that culture don't). That is, we assume that what is real is what is physical. When Plato was writing about what is metaphysical rather than the physical, he was writing about something extra, something beyond that physical reality. Sometimes this other level of reality is spoken of as a supersensible realm, in that it is beyond the world of sensory experience, and also beyond a comprehension which requires sense data.

This is *not* the way that Plato would have looked at transcendent reality. It is not something extra, superposed on physical reality and the world of sensory experience. It was there first, and had its existence before matter and sensory experience came to have existence.

This is the plenum, which I have discussed elsewhere in this collection of essays. It is unlimited, and undefined. It is what must be there before anything is defined. It is neither presence nor absence. It can be thought of as the nothingness before the creation of anything, but to characterise it as nothingness is to misunderstand both what it is, and how it needs to be understood.

If the physical world did not exist, and so there was no such thing as movement, all that might be possible, in terms of a physical existence, and consequently movement, would necessarily exist in potential in that transcendent and undefined plenum. The evidence of our senses, and the categories of our understanding, tell us that the world of movement and

change, illusion or not, has a certain level of reality, which has a certain mathematical regularity, which is one way to define something which has intelligible reality. All of that is necessarily present in the plenum, which is ever-present and unchanging, and devoid of actual movement. Of any sort at all.

From Plato's point of view, the transcendent reality is the only thing which is truly real, and which is necessarily what it is, and not something other than it is. It is not a copy of anything. It is eternal in its nature, and is not subject to change of any sort.

The major difficulty in understanding Plato arises from the fact that almost all discussion in Plato's canon of works is based on an abstract understanding of the transcendent reality. He is not trying to penetrate what is transcendently real from the point of view of physical or sensory reality, existing in time and space. Instead, he has an understanding of the nature of what is real, largely built on logical and dialectical argument.

By this I mean the nature of reality itself can be approached and understood by questioning what it is, and what it is not, what properties it may or may not have, and how it stands in relation to the physical world. Questions such as 'is reality itself one or many? If it is one, how is it the case that the physical and sensory world is full of things, and why is it represented to us in such a way?' And the opposite question also makes sense: 'if reality consists of the many, and not one thing, in what way can we understand reality as reality itself? Why should there be many things at the root of reality?'

Which is how the ancient consensus about the nature of reality came to be. This consensus was in place as early as the mid-second millennium BCE. But possibly much earlier than that.

So much of Plato's argumentation is based on a point of view which we generally do not share in the modern world, and which is hard for us to fathom. Where Plato's work is taught, which is almost every major academic institution in the world, it is not taught or understood in terms of a range of arguments which apply to the transcendent reality, and questions of existence and the creation of a physical world which is full of both things and images. Instead, it is taught in terms of exercises in human thought, covering a vast range of subjects, including discussions of metaphysics, the ideas of beauty and justice, ethics and morality, of friendship and love, mathematics, geometry; even philology and etymology (in the *Cratylus*). It is taught in this way, since much of subsequent philosophical thought has its roots in Plato's dialogues, even if we do not fully understand the point of view expressed in them.

So Platonic thought is taught in a fragmentary way, which Plato would not have understood, and the intellectual and logical roots of the dialogues are often treated as neither here nor there.

The tradition of studying Plato lay largely fallow after the collapse of the ancient world, and particularly after the closure of the philosophical schools in 529 C.E. This closure is an extremely significant event in history, though the destruction of the glories of the ancient world had been under way already for a considerable period (as far back as the argument with Caligula about putting images of Caesar in the temple in Jerusalem, recorded by Philo Judaeus, who was the man who drew the short straw). The closure of the schools tells us that the basis upon which the ancient world once argued about the nature of reality and physical existence was opposed by imperial power and its requirements, and that humanity was entering a period in which knowledge and thought were thoroughly deprecated.

Ideas of the importance of knowledge and what it is, and also what is meant by the divine, and the role of the divine for the human race, were now based on the requirements of the secular powers, and their political and ideological concerns.

Formerly, political power, and royal and imperial knowledge of the will of the divine and the gods, drew strength from the idea that there was a rational connection between the nature of reality and the divine, and the world of the here and now, the secular world of time, and of physical power (expressed eloquently by Homer, with the golden chain of Zeus stretching into the world, according to his will). Now the nature of reality was of no interest, and gave nothing to the secular powers. Whatever was left of the notion of a rational connection between physical reality and the divine ran the other way. Physical power and its preoccupations would now determine the kinds of discussions there would be about divine things.

We have been on this downward slide since the time of imperial Rome and its campaigns of conquest. It is one of the most powerful of Roman legacies.

The story of the occasional and partial reversals of this long intellectual and cultural slide has yet to be told coherently, and I am not going to undertake the task here. I will mention the reversal in the Italian renaissance, where Plato was understood rather differently than he is now. For example, it is useful to approach Plato through Marsilio Ficino's understanding of his work, and also through the writings of Giordano Bruno.

It is not that we have no alternative ways to approach Platonic thought; but we choose not to look at another approach, since we know what is real, and what isn't. We think this is a rational view, and our own way of thinking, but it has been gifted to us as the result of political and

ideological struggles long ago, which did not fear to destroy rational connection with a transcendent Reality, once understood as the reason why the physical world existed at all.

Standing in the Place of Ea

The Adapa Discipline and Kingship in the Neo-Assyrian Empire

This chapter contains extensive information about the Adapa discipline and its role in the preparation for kingship in Sargonid Assyria, and the place of both within the Assyrian model of the world.

Both the myth and the discipline of Adapa can be argued to have been of central cultural importance in the Sargonid period; the evidence for this is particularly strong in the textual remains of the later kings, Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal. This aspect of the kingship illuminates the self-perception of the Sargonids perhaps more clearly and concisely than any other single form of evidence, and may even constitute the backbone of that self-perception, providing the order about which the other types of evidence ought to be arranged.

It is interesting to see that Assyrian kingship in this period (mainly eighth and seventh centuries B.C.E) was firmly associated with moral action. Much in the Assyrian state depended on the king, his skills, and the performance of ritual observances. This is partly the result of the Assyrian understanding that moral action occurred within a teleological frame. As representative of the divine Ashur on earth, the king reflects an understanding of the perfection of Ashur, and that such perfection should be emulated in his life. Good order in the state depended on this.

The paper was written some years ago, and reflects my views at the time of writing. I would write it a little differently now, particularly in connection

with the meaning of the Adapa myth. But that is true of many papers that we write. Now that it is clear that it was understood to be possible for the Assyrian king to assume a temporary divinity in special circumstances, the significance of Adapa's "ascent to heaven" is subject to different interpretation. The same temporary divinity is possible for other functionaries in Assyria, including scholars and craftsmen. This rather surprising state of affairs is discussed in some detail in *The Sacred History of Being*.

Thomas Yaeger, 26 June 2015.

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We have two principal sources concerning the myth and discipline of Adapa:

1. The myth is known to us principally from a document found in two locations: the library of Ashurbanipal at Nineveh, and an earlier text from the Amarna archive in Egypt. [89]

2. The Annals of Ashurbanipal, in which he describes the discipline of the Adapa, which formed part of his training for the kingship while crown prince. [90]

The myth of the Adapa is currently understood to have provided a contemporary explanation of the convention that Assyrian kings were not divine, and also a justification of their right to rule. [91] The account given by Ashurbanipal of his training gives us something of the context in which the myth functioned, and the way Assyrian kings understood their role. His description breaks down naturally into three categories of instruction:

1. Scholarship and inquiry
2. Military Skills
3. Emulation of the King's administrative function

The importance of this pattern of training for the later functioning of the king may be illustrated by analytical comparison with the royal correspondence. It may be broken down into roughly parallel groupings:

1. Religion, Magic and Medicine, Astronomy, Astrology and Divination
2. War
3. Provincial administration, Agriculture and Commerce, Court and Officials, Property and Revenue of the Temples. [92]

The Myth of Adapa (I)

Adapa is instructed in the ways of heaven by Ea, the "broad eared one" (signifying wisdom). [93] Dalley remarks that: “Adapa was also known as Uan, which is the name given as Oannes by Berossus to the first sage; the name Uan also forms a pun on the Sumero-Akkadian word for a craftsman... as the first sage, Adapa-Oannes introduced the correct rites of religious observance to mankind, and was the priest of Ea in his temple in Eridu”. [94]

The precise meaning of the story is unclear, but it appears to explain why Adapa was not granted immortality and remained as a mortal sage (apkallum). According to the fourth fragment of the text, lines 10-11, Anu decreed freedom from compulsory service for the city of Ea (Eridu). To

glorify his high priesthood "until faraway days [he decreed] as (his) destiny". [95]

The Discipline of the Adapa

The text which tells of Ashurbanipal's training for the role of king proclaims that: "[Marduk], master of the gods, granted me as a gift a receptive mind (lit., wide-ear) and ample power of thought". [96]
This is a deliberate allusion to the granting of divine wisdom by Ea (the broad-eared) to Adapa. He further tells us that: "the art (lit., work) of the Master Adapa I learned (lit., acquired), the hidden treasure of all scribal knowledge, the [signs] of heaven and earth". [97]

The scribal training was the most important part of the education of the crown prince. Since the future Assyrian king was understood to stand in the same relation to the gods as Adapa stood in relation to Ea, we are also told by Ashurbanipal that he participated (to some degree, impossible to quantify) in the life of artisans: "in the assembly of the artisans I received orders" (?) [98]

This would appear to suggest that not only was it part of his training for kingship that he know something of other social groups but that he should also know how to take instruction. He continues: "I have studied (lit., struggled with) the heavens with the learned masters of oil divination." He also tells us that he has: "solved the laborious (problems of) division and multiplication, which were not clear."

he has read also: "the artistic script of Sumer (and) the dark (obscure) Akkadian, which is hard to master, (now) taking pleasure in the reading of the stones (i.e., steles) (coming) from before the flood, (now) being angered (because I was) stupid (and) addled (?) by the beautiful script". [99]

The foregoing requirements of the discipline of the Adapa fall under the heading of scholarship and enquiry. Next follow details of military skills. He tells us that he rode a horse, went hunting, was skilled as an archer and as the thrower of heavy lances. He could handle the aritu and kababu shields; in addition to these skills he could drive a chariot (he is depicted as a chariot driver in the palace reliefs). [100]

All these appear to have been understood as crafts, for he concludes these remarks by saying that "I wished to be the great lord (?) of all the craftsmen" (i.e., to be the best of them all). [101] Given the nature of the coronation ceremony, for which we have an invaluable text, it would seem that he required the acclamation of his inferiors, to be perceived to merit the honour of occupying a transcendent office. [102] Indeed, in speaking of his skills as an archer, he specifically says that he "shot (lit., let fly) the arrow, the sign of my valour"

Ashurbanipal then passes on to a description of his preparation for the highest office: "At the same time I was learning royal decorum, walking in the kingly ways." [103] He says that he: "stood before the king, my begetter, giving commands to the nobles. Without my (consent) (lit., without me) no governor was appointed, no prefect was installed in my absence." Thus, the role of the crown prince is to emulate the king as it is the role of the king to emulate Adapa. Though the office of king must be merited, the

merit of the candidate for the crown prince-ship was understood to be conferred through the favour of the gods: "The father, my begetter, saw for himself the bravery which the great gods decreed as my (portion)."

The king conceived a great love for this particular son, but, it is explicitly stated that this love is the command of the great gods. The particular son was chosen from the assembly of brothers by divine will; that he might rule depended upon the king imploring the gods, addressing his prayers "to Nabu and Marduk, who give throne and sceptre, who establish kingship..." [104]

Ashurbanipal describes his installation as king in the bit-riduti: "at the command of Assur, father of the Gods, Marduk lord of lords, king of the gods, he raised (exalted) me above the (other) king's sons". This installation is represented as causing peace in the land: "the four regions (of the world) were in perfect order, like the finest oil." [105] He also says that in his first year of rule: "I laid hold of the hem of the garment of his great godhead, I gave my attention to his sanctuaries." [106] That is, the chain of connection between the world of the gods and that of man was his first priority.

The Perfection of the King

Throughout the texts and inscriptions and iconography we are presented with images of the king as a kind of perfection. He is at the apex of the social structure of Assyria and is its principal priest (in terms of his symbolic participation in the key rituals). Thus he is the most excellent of human beings and holds his position because of his theoretical excellence in all

aspects of Assyrian life: exercising the virtues of kingship, justice, statecraft, warfare, divination, administration, etc. It would be easy to argue that the king was understood to have the privilege of contact with the divine on account of his pre-eminence in human society; almost that the king arrogated this privilege to himself because of his power to do so. However, this would be to retroject a secularism into Assyrian society which the evidence does not warrant. [107]

Instead, much of the evidence is explained if we infer that the king owed his privileges of contact with the gods and his rulership over mankind to the fact that he was perceived as a paragon of excellence and perfection: he was rewarded according to his merits within the framework of a gift economy. In other words, that his wisdom and power came to him as corollaries by virtue of his perfection, not only in eminence among men, but among all men. [108] From the Assyrian point of view, the reason for the existence of a point of contact between the king and the gods at all is that they have something in common, and that the point of contact is precisely the pre-eminence, the excellence, and the perfection of the king in all his roles. It is this commonality which establishes the harmony between the world of man and that of the gods. [109]

It was widely held in antiquity that perfection was a characteristic of completion: the perfect is that which is complete, and that which is complete is perfect. Thus the king is also complete, in his attainments, his power, his wisdom and his capacity. In this the king emulates the divine, all aspects of which must be complete in their own natures.* [110] Thus, in acting as "apkallum" (in effect standing in for Ea) in rituals necessary for the continuation of the Assyrian state (as illustrated in the throne room relief where the king is shown apparently engaged in the business of

fertilizing the date palm represented as a sacred tree) the ritual is brought closer to the divine creation, and the consonance of the act with the divine will is emphasised. [111]

The king is the agent of the divine in the fight against chaos and the maintenance of order in his realm (which struggle might be characterized as war with the imperfect and the incomplete: cf. the Enuma Elish and the strange creatures which were made in the first creation). [112] The divine is understood as a place on the other side of the limit of the world which the king rules, from which he is excluded except in terms of priestly contact. [113] He is near to the divine, but not so proximate to qualify as divine himself. [114]

As the most perfect individual in his state the king nearly emulated the divine in containing all things: he is complete. It is a short step from such a view to the notion that the completion of his nature and that of Assur can be made concrete by its literal realization. The king is "king of kings", and the concept is rendered emphatic by means of conquest and the subjection of surrounding states from the Upper Sea to the Lower Sea. [115] Hence also his description as "king of countries" and "king of the four quarters (lit., edges) of the world". It is possible that the king's embodiment of the idea of the divine extended so far that his "official" moods were in imitation of the gods, understood to be manifest in the motions of the planets: the evidence which suggests this as a possibility is the fact that the Crown Prince was excluded from the presence of the King when Mars was in opposition to the Sun and hence subject to retrograde motions (which exclusion is itself an interesting reflection of the Adapa myth: Ea knew that Adapa was not fit to appear in the presence of Anu without some schooling in what to say). [116]

It is difficult to specify exactly what is going on here, but it would appear that there is some kind of transactive relationship understood to exist between the abstract (gods) and the concrete (the earthly responsibilities of the king): the character of some of the acts for which we have evidence is best explained by presuming that the principal point of the actions of the king was to create a harmony between heaven and earth - literally to join them together; to act as agent of the divine, not to supplant its position, or to exploit it for personal ends.[117]

The King and Totality

The concept of totality, a feature of both the Adapa (myth and discipline) and Assyrian theology, is the logical corollary of the association of the king with completed action: it is another way of framing the idea that the universe is structured according to degrees of participation in the ultimate completion (the realm of the divine). This ultimate completion is necessarily transcendent - the completion of completions - in that we can have no commerce with it except via certain special individuals in auspicious circumstances. However, the essential characteristic of the divine, if it cannot be said to exist in the world, can be emulated within the limitations imposed by the nature of earthly reality. Hence we find the king engaged in conquest and empire building, attempting to take hold of the known universe and to subject it to his will (which is naturally the will of the divine).[118] This ambition (if not necessarily the reality) is reflected in the style of the king's inscriptions, whether addressed to a human or divine audience. Client kings make sense within this emulatory system: a king need not rule directly, just as Marduk need not. A proxy representative

(bound by oaths to the Assyrian king, just as the king is bound by oath to the god) is not only satisfactory, but fits harmoniously into the Assyrian model of the world.

The Myth of Adapa (II)

Several key concepts are brought together in the myth, or rather appear to be spun out of one central idea, related to the problem of man's connection with the divine: in the poem Anu is the supreme god: Ea knows the mind and the plans of Heaven and Earth. Adapa has connection with Ea on two counts:

he is his son, and he has been initiated into the ways of heaven and earth by him.

Men in general have connection with the divine through the wisdom of Adapa, and through the discipline of the Adapa.

Adapa breaks the wing of the south wind (a wind favourable for kingship) while at sea fishing for the temple of Ea at Eridu.[119] He is on the wide sea (described as "like a mirror"); Ea's wisdom is explicitly compared with the wide sea, and Adapa is both in the place of Ea and clearly identified with it at the time when kingship is destroyed (note also that since the occurrence takes place at night the sea must be like a black mirror, with the same characteristics as the liver at the moment it is removed from the body of a sheep. This parallel is probably deliberate, since the point of divination is to know the mind of the gods).

Wide understanding was associated with the power to make decrees, and both were characteristics of kingship. The first fragment tells us that Adapa possessed wisdom and that "his command was like the command of [Anu] [...] (line 2); "with wide understanding he had perfected him to expound (?) the decrees of the land" (line 3). His power to give decrees comes from his perfection, his completion, which is like that of the gods; but, naturally, it is not the same completion. His connection with the divine is to be understood as functioning through his completion: see Plato's *Phaedo*, 100, "greatness is the participation in the great". But, though he had been given wisdom by Ea, he had not granted Adapa eternal life (line 4). Ea had however created him as a leader among mankind (line 6) and: "no one treated his command lightly" (line 7).[120]

Thus, Adapa is in the place of kingship, in that he has been placed in the realm of his father; because he is in that place he has the power to make decrees and he breaks the wing of the South wind with the utterance of his command. He in effect has usurped kingship, because he was cast deep into the realm of his father.

Why did the south wind bring Adapa into the realm of his father? To answer this, we should ask why it is that the south wind should be associated with kingship in the first place. It is partly because in Mesopotamia the south wind is associated with storms and unpredictability. Thus the south wind connotes power, and power which transcends our capacity to predict its behaviour. As the gods are powerful and transcendently unpredictable, so the kings as their representatives (and emulators) are likewise powerful and unpredictable.

There is a two-way process involved here: standing in the place of wide understanding promotes the power to make decrees and kingship, and kingship itself promotes wide understanding, expressed by Adapa's immersion in Ea's kingdom, the Apsu. Thus the South wind, emblematic of kingship, is responsible for conferring the power on another entity to break its wing (its power to be what it is). [121]

This aspect of the myth is probably significant for the understanding of how the Sargonids understood royal succession. The kings had institutionalised the transfer of power from the king to the crown prince (possibly as the result of numerous occurrences of factional infighting in the royal court). His education prepared him to stand in the place of his father. While his education continued, he was not allowed to live in the same place as his father (the royal palace), but instead lived in a separate establishment which mirrored its character and functions. The crown prince was given an entourage like that of the king, drawn from the sons of the nobles forming his own court. Thus, as the king is the image of the god, so the crown prince is the image of the king. The crown prince was chosen by the king from amongst his sons and the decision was confirmed by omens and divination. That is, the kingship of the crown prince was legitimate only if confirmed by the gods. Note that Adapa was engaged in fishing out of sight of the sun god (i.e., at night) at the time he encountered the south wind, and that therefore the sun god could not see what was happening and give his sanction. [122]Therefore the arrogation of kingship, even divinity, by Adapa, is illegitimate.

Adapa is hauled before the gods to answer for his crime. He is instructed by Ea as to what to say. He expresses dismay that two gods are missing from the land, Dumuzi and Gizzida. The meaning of the first name is

'faithful son', and the second (translated by Dalley as 'trusty timber') may be translated as 'legitimizing throne' (GIS.ZI.DA). As the destroyer of the kingship belonging to his father he has failed to be a faithful son, and has usurped the throne.

His father however, being wiser than Adapa, knowing the plans of the gods, instructs him to refuse the food and water offered to him, saying that he will be offered the food and water of death:

> 28..... As though standest before Anu, 29. They will offer thee the food of death;30. Do not eat (it). The water of death they will offer thee; 31. Do not drink (it). A garment they will offer thee; 32. Clothe thyself (with it). Oil they will offer thee; anoint thyself (with it). 33. The instruction which I have given thee do not forget; the words 34. Which I have spoken unto thee, hold fast....

He is instructed only to accept the mourning garment and the anointing oil. But in fact, Anu instructs that he be offered the food and water of eternal life (which is in effect Adapa's due, since he has emulated the gods). He refuses, perhaps because he trusts his father, which is, according to this kind of world view, a mistake, since the ways of the gods are forever beyond our capacity to understand. According to Dalley, the actual words used in the text to denote the food and water of life involve wordplay which renders the sense confusing and ambiguous, which is appropriate for the circumstances in which Adapa finds himself. Dalley comments that the verb chosen to alliterate with the words for "food" and "eat" is unusual [akalu, kalu, and akalu (different stress)]. Also, that "an unusual plural form of the word "heaven" produces a pun, "bread of heaven/bread of death" [shamuti/sha muti]

It is worth comparing the following neo-Babylonian text for the purposes of illustration of the Mesopotamian perplexity at the nature of the gods:

> I taught my land to observe the divine ordinances,
> To honour the name of the goddess I instructed my people. (30)
> The king's majesty I equated to that of a god,
> And reverence for the royal palace I inculcated in the troops.
> Oh that I only knew that these things are well pleasing to a god!
> What is good in one's sight is evil for a god.
> what is bad in one's own mind is good for his god.
> Who can understand the counsel of the gods in the midst of heaven?
> The plan of a god is deep waters, who can comprehend it?
> Where has befuddled mankind ever learned what a god's conduct is?

And, speaking of men:

> When they are hungry they resemble corpses.
> When they are sated they rival their god;
> In good luck they speak of ascending to heaven,
> When they are afflicted they grumble about going down to the underworld. [123]

Adapa's unreasonable response confirms to the gods the accidental nature of Adapa's emulation: if he had truly understood the ways of heaven and earth (like his father) he would not have refused the offer of food and water. It is probably for this reason that Anu orders that Adapa be brought back to Earth: Adapa did not merit the corollary of a complete emulation of the gods. It was always Ea's intention that Adapa be a leader among

mankind [I. 6-14] and Ea seems to have made sure that Adapa returned to fulfill the role for which he, like the crown prince, was chosen.

Wisdom, the king and the Akitu contest

The character of Ea and its associations with wisdom appears problematic, but probably the difficulty is more apparent than real. Wisdom to those without it is necessarily mysterious - its order is glimpsed on occasion, but mostly it appears like chaos, for which water is an excellent metaphor. In the Mesopotamian cosmology the entire world is surrounded by water, which simultaneously represents both its limitation and its foundation. The inhabited world is a world of relative order separated out of the waters of chaos; the king, as agent of the gods has as one of his functions the maintenance and increase of the available order within the limits of his rule.

Hence the representation of the battle between Ashur (or Marduk) and Tiamat in the Akitu festival. As W.G. Lambert points out, Sennacherib instituted an Assyrian Akitu festival as part of his attempt to substitute Ashur for Marduk "the 'High God' of the land..." [124] The festival took place in the Akitu house of the city, and:

> A well-known inscription describes the door of this house on which was portrayed Ashur advancing to do battle with Tiamat, escorted by ten gods in front and fifteen behind. A slightly broken list of the same ten gods occurs on a Late Assyrian ritual fragment... which describes them as "preceding [Ashur] to the Akitu house"... A combination of these two items of information suggests, if it does not prove, that the

procession of gods from the city to the Akitu house was construed as a setting out for battle with Tiamat.

The battle, Lambert presumes, took place inside the Akitu house. If there is a parallel here with Adapa's breaking of the wing of the south wind while on the sea we should expect that at some point in the Akitu festival that either the king or a statue of the 'High God' should be represented as on the sea; literally standing in the place of Tiamat. Three pieces of related evidence from Babylonia are offered by Lambert: the first he describes as a comment on a late magical text, quoting the line: “This refers to Bel who sits in the middle of the Sea (Tiamat) in the Akitu”. [125]

The second piece of evidence comes from the text called "the topography of Babylon" which gives us information about small cultic structures in the city: “Tiamat (Sea) is the seat of Bel on which Bel sits”.

The third piece of evidence comes from a "hitherto unidentified epic which appears to describe Nabu's exaltation to equality with his father Marduk". This passage is interesting in itself as reflecting ideas present in the myth of Adapa, since, "if the text has been correctly understood, Nabu went with his father, as usual, to the Akitu, but then insisted on performing the rites which *properly should have been done by his father*" (my emphasis). The line quoted by Lambert is: “He set his feet on the rolling sea (Tiamat)”. [126]

Note that the sea is described as "rolling" - that is, the sea is not calm and is in the condition in which it most resembles chaos, paralleling the struggle between Adapa and the south wind. Lambert argues that "the Sea (Tiamat) was no doubt a small cultic structure in the Akitu house (probably a dais) and when the statue of Marduk was taken there, it was set on the dais to symbolise victory over Tiamat". [127] Further, "the presence of the

gods there and their heaping up of gifts for Marduk is entirely consistent with the idea that Marduk delivered them from danger by taking their part in fighting with Tiamat”. [128]

Conclusion

The myth embraces a number of themes, including the importance of wisdom for kingship, the order and power of the gods (and the corollary: their inscrutability to mere mortals); the significance of rational arrangement, shown by the fact that Adapa is also the name of a musical instrument; the conquest of chaos by the forces of order; the transfer of power from one legitimate authority to another (i.e., the succession); that all aspects of Assyrian society were understood to be embraced in the meaning of kingship, from artisan to soldier, from scribe to priest. Much of the nature of Sargonid kingship can be related to the myth of Adapa: this is already known to us because Ashurbanipal informs us of the discipline of kingship which bears his name (Adapa). Close examination of the myth (alluded to by the other Sargonid kings) shows that aspects of the Neo-Assyrian Empire not referred to in royal documents and inscriptions in connection with the myth, can be explained on the basis of the themes which it contains.

In drawing these themes together, the myth reflects the Assyrian concept of the symbolic function of the king, which was to embody the various aspects of the Assyrian state, and to be, emblematically at least, the totality of the world, the embodiment of all earthly power, wisdom, learning, justice, valour, skill, etc. Assyria itself likewise should contain within itself the best of what the rest of the universe had to offer: hence the botanical gardens, the zoological collection, and, from our point of view most significant of all, the library at Nineveh, collected by Ashurbanipal and intended to embrace important documents and texts from all over Mesopotamia, and from all periods of its history.

Since occupation of the throne of Ashur implies an emulation of the divine, (the king embodying some of the characteristics of the gods, in particular their unpredictability), the king is standing in the place of the divine. By being like the gods, the gods are present in the land. In sitting on a throne mounted on a dais representing the "rolling" sea, the king acquires the character of the abyss (which is unpredictable and unknowable). This way of looking at things ties the image of the king into the pattern of ideas which made the exaltation of statues and the sacrifice of animals "rational" acts.[129]

There is no reference to the goddess Ishtar in the myth, but we can perhaps detect a connection with Ishtar in the ideas represented in the Akkadian version of "The Descent of Ishtar to the Nether world". As Ishtar stands at the entrance to the Netherworld, the gatekeeper announces her to her sister, the queen of the Netherworld (Ereshkigal), describing her with the words: "She who upholds the festivals, *who stirs up the deep before Ea*, the k[ing]" (my emphasis).[130] It is an interesting and significant characteristic of Mesopotamian ritual, liturgy and poetry, that many components can stand in for one another, as Ishtar, in this case, stands in for the South wind.

Notes

[←1]

Hence the remark by Jesus that ‘the Kingdom of Heaven is within you’.

[←2]

Socrates argued that we already know many of the things that we think we don't know, and his educational practice was tailored to show this. I would argue that Socrates reveals by this that he believed that all men have latent access to the divine condition, in that we are all connected with the transcendent reality which is the place of ideal knowledge. The divine is potentially immanent within us.

[←3]

I first became acutely aware of the importance of this equation between fact and value in the teleologically-framed universe in class with one of my teachers of philosophy, Len Pinski, with whom I studied Plato's *Republic* and the *Nicomachean Ethics* of Aristotle in 1988.

[←4]

This information can be found in Simo Parpola's doctoral thesis from 1971 *Letters from Assyrian Scholars* (LAS), and concerns the planet Mars.

[←5]

Also discussed in Parpola's LAS. Divination by the shadow of the earth on the face of the moon is also discussed in Michael Roaf's *Cultural Atlas of Assyria*.

[←6]

It is likely to have been gibberish, but we are familiar with glossolalia or ‘speaking in tongues’ in the modern world, among evangelical Christian groups. The human brain has a facility for scrambling known language into something strange and foreign. This would have been the requirement here.

[←7]

In a similar manner to Moses and Aaron. Moses was in communication with Yahweh, but required an interpreter to translate his utterances into intelligible Hebrew.

[←8]

The Hebrew god spoke of himself as the ‘First and Last’, which is a poetic way of expressing the idea that the god embraces all things. Yahweh is at the limit of what is. The horizon for us represents the limit of what we can see, though we know that what we can see is not all there is. As a poetic metaphor however, it is perfect. The horizon marks the point where this world turns into something else, which has no dimension and transcends our own. It is interesting to speculate how the nature of the earth (being a sphere), conspires to validate this idea in the case of someone watching a ship reach the horizon, at which point it diminishes and appears to descend into it.

[←9]

The explanation for this is obvious: to us sacrifice is an irrational practice, which can have no meaning except in terms of how the conduct of sacrifice appeared and functioned within its social and anthropological context. Thus the detail is of very little interest, and nothing of importance will be discovered by looking closely at the phenomena.

[←10]

Robert K.G. Temple, *Netherworld: Discovering the Oracle of the Dead.* 2002. ch 6: Divination by Entrails, p193. Quoting Morris Jastrow: 'The Liver as the Seat of the Soul' pp 143-68, in D. G. Lyon and G.F. Moore, eds, *Studies in the History of Religions Presented to Crawford Howell Toy*, New York, 1912

[←11]

Boden, Peggy Jean, *The Mesopotamian Washing of the Mouth (Mis Pi) Ritual*: *An Examination of Some of the Social and Communication Strategies Which Guided the Development and Performance of the Ritual Which Transferred the Essence of the Deity Into Its Temple Statue.* Ph.D Diss. Near Eastern Studies, The Johns Hopkins University. Pp 1-261, 1998.

[←12]

Early on Walker and Dick discussed working on two related publications – one (as Dick says) a *haute* vulgarisation on the making and dedication of the cult image in the Ancient Near East (*Born in Heaven, Made on Earth*) and also in Egypt, and secondly, a critical edition of the ritual mis pi in its various versions.

[←13]

Preston, James J. “Creation of the Sacred Image: Apotheosis and Destruction in Hinduism”. Pp. 9-30 in *Gods of Flesh, Gods of Stone*, ed. Joanne Punzo Waghorne and Norman Cutlet. 1995, Chamberberg, Penn.: Anima.

[←14]

The Christian struggle with idolatry has been extremely long, and biblical attacks on cult images have had an impact on the relationship between the West and cultures of the East, even in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Dick points out for example that when the East India Trading Company assumed the role of protector of India's shrines in the mid-nineteenth century, there were denunciations in Parliament about the 'idolatrous' expenses for England in giving protection to cult images. Dick also mentions that scholars had difficulty explaining how an urbane and literate society such as India could still practice so-called 'primitive idolatry'. In *Born in Heaven, Made on Earth*, Eisenbrauns, 1999 p ix.

[←15]

Op. cit., pp viii-ix. Citing the apocryphal Letter of Jeremiah, dating to the second or third centuries B.C.E., which 'attacks the making and worship of the cult image as a mere 'work of human hands', which is contrasted with the 'work of God'. This topos ("How can the product of human hands be a god?") is at the core of the biblical assault on the cult image. How could the great ancient religions of Babylon and Egypt (and the Hinduism of modern India) explain that a statue crafted by human hands can embody the divine?'

[←16]

Greek eikonodoulos: "One who serves images"; also iconodulist or iconophile.

[←17]

Published originally (in German) in *Die Inschriften Asarhaddons, Königs von Assyrien*. AfO Beiheft. 9. Graz

[←18]

This is the essence of the practice of theurgy – the making of whatever it is that is essential to the divine, to the gods, and thus the creation of gods and goddesses. The results of the procedure is gods, not merely their images. Dick is of course well aware that Mesopotamian texts often do not distinguish between the god and the image of the god. He says [*Born in Heaven, Made on Earth*, p32] 'There is no question that cuneiform texts from Mesopotamia, both historical and religious, can refer to the statue as if it simply were the god himself/herself. The multiple peregrinations of Babylon's statue of Marduk due to raids were often phrased as if the God Marduk went on a journey'. He instances a text from the reign of the Kassite king of Babylon Agumkakrime (1602-1585 B.C.E) which talks of Marduk's return from captivity in Hana:

When the Great Gods told by their pure word Marduk the Lord of Esangila and of Babylon to return to Babylon, Marduk determined to return to Babylon…. I planned and paid close attention and made him ready to take back to Babylon; I supported Marduk who loves my reign. I consulted King Shamash through a lamb of the bārû priest.

[←19]

This way of thinking is common to both Mesopotamian and Greek models of the creation of man. For the Mesopotamians the world was created by lesser divinities. In the case of Plato's description of the creation, the world is a copy, a moving image of eternity, and created by the demiourgos, after the pattern of unchanging eternity itself. For both cultures, this reflects the notion that the begotten world could not be created by the unbegotten divine directly.

[←20]

Barasch, Moshe *Icon: Studies in the History of an Idea.* New York: New York University Press, 1992.

[←21]

In his book *Greek Religion*, trans. John Raffian. Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1985. Of course, Greek literature contains many references to divine images. It would be a strange circumstance if divine statues in Greece were uniquely *not* associated with rituals for installation.

[←22]

In Esarhaddon's case, toward the Abzu, which 'determines the destinies'.

[←23]

The former in Babylonian are referred to as mis pi rituals, and in Sumerian KA.LU H.U.DA. The latter are known as pit pi in Babylonian, and in Sumerian KA.DU H.U.DA).

[←24]

The Egyptian term for statue is ‘tut’. The name of Tutankhamun is read as ‘Living image of Amun’ – thus the term ‘tut’ for statue may also mean ‘image’.

[←25]

In Exodus 20:4, 23; 34:17; Leviticus 19:4; 26:1; Deuteronomy 4:15ff; and 27:15

[←26]

Born in Heaven, Made on Earth, pp1-2. Dohmen's work was published in 1987 – *Das Bilderverbot: Seine Entstehung und Seine Entwicklung im Alten Testament.* 2nd. ed. BBB 62. Bonn: Athenäum.

[←27]

Mettinger, T. 'No Graven Image? Israelite Aniconism in Its Ancient Near Eastern Context.' ConBibOT 42. Stockholm: Alqvist & Wiksell, 1995

.

[←28]

Dick suggests that earlier Israelite religion ‘probably tended toward henotheism or monolatry rather than monotheism.’ However this suggestion depends on the inference that there was an evolution in the pattern of Hebrew belief during the 1st half of the 1st Millennium B.C.E.

[←29]
Hendel, Ronald S. “The Social Origins of the Aniconic Tradition in Early Israel”. CBQ 50: 365-82.

[←30]

Psalm 132

[←32]

1 Kings 8:7; 2 Chron 3:8ff.

[←33]

For the reason that images can become quickly more important than the ideas which they represent, and offer the danger of assimilation to other cults.

[←34]

2 Kings 18:4.

[←35]

2 Kings 22-23.

[←36]

However this identification may have been implicit in the conceptual model within which cult images made sense. As we have seen, modern translators are reluctant to recognise an ancient identification of gods with their images where their manufacture is concerned. This difficulty was present for commentators in antiquity also.

[←37]

We might ask how it was understood Yahweh can confer holiness on human beings. It is possible to accept this idea as a religious revelation. But we have already encountered an intellectual idea which provides a logical and rational basis for this kind of statement: the doctrine of wholes and totalities, referenced by both Pythagoras and Plato.

[←38]

According to D. Knapp in *Untersuchungen zu Deut. 4*. Ph.D Dissertation. Göttingen [no date]. Cited in Christoph Dohmen's *Das Bilderverbot: Seine Entstehung und Seine Entwicklung im Alten Testament.* 2nd. ed. BBB 62. Bonn: Athenäum.

[←39]

Published in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. iii.

[←40]

He does not use the more neutral ‘agalma’ which means ‘statue.’

[←41]

Knowledge has an ancient association with altars as well as statues, since the altar is a point of ritual contact with the divine.

[←42]

Such things do happen however. For example, Queen Elizabeth I is known to have attended Catholic Mass in private at least once, though she was the head of the Protestant Church of England which forbade them.

[←43]

The lamentations of Job indicate that the cult was aware that Yahweh necessarily transcended the capacity of its adherents to understand the divinity. Or at least that the nature of divinity was problematic for mortals.

[←44]

This might explain why the Hebrews came to read the action of Yahweh in the world in terms of events and history. The bibilical texts are however full of images, constantly echoed by those in other books.

[←45]

It is suggested that forms of polytheistic religion which are built around a noumenal and transcendent monotheism should be distinguished by a term other than polytheism, which restricts our capacity to discuss the phenomenon without confusion. ‘’Eidetic-monotheism’ could be used to define a monotheism which uses images to recall Being itself. ‘Monotheism’ would then indicate an idea of transcendent Being which is not accessible through images, and is not represented in any way, as in Israel in the later 1st millennium BCE. The term ‘polytheism’ then could be used to refer to assemblages of gods which are clearly not intended to function as a way of recalling Being itself.

[←46]

the Rex Sacrōrum (or Rex Sacrificulus: ‘king of sacrifice’), was the name given by the Romans to a priest who, after the abolition of the royal power, had to perform certain religious rites connected with the name of king’. Thus, like the Greeks, the king formerly occupied a key role in the religious and cult activity of the Romans. ‘He resembles the archon basileus of the Athenian constitution. He was always a patrician, was elected for life by the pontifex maximus with the assistance of the whole pontifical college (of which he became a member), and was inaugurated by the augurs. Although he was externally of high rank and, like the pontifex maximus, had an official residence in the Regia, the royal castle of Num, and took the chair at the feasts and other festivities of the pontifices, yet in his religious authority he ranked below the pontifex maximus, and was not allowed to hold any public office, or even to address the people in public. His wife (like the wives of the flamens) participated in the priesthood….’ Seyffert also says that the rex sacrorum used to ‘summon the people to the Capitol on the calends and nones of each month’ (in the days before the knowledge of the calendar became general), ‘and to announce the festivals for the month. On the calends he and regina sacrificed, and at the same time invoked Janus…’.

[←47]

Seyffert, Oskar, *Dictionary of Classical Antiquities*, [rev & ed. by Nettleship and Sandys], 1906, 'Janus'.

[←48]

Smith, William *Smaller Classical Dictionary,* 1891 ' Janus'

[←49]

the Camenae being the fountain nymphs who belong to the ancient religion of Italy, and which are sometimes identified with the muses.

[←50]

19th century philology tended to the view that many of the gods developed from a primitive picture of the sky and the sun, and that the etymology of the names of the gods reflected this.

[←51]

Juturna (Diuturna) was the nymph of a fountain in Latium (according to Smith), famous for its healing qualities, whose water was used in most sacrifices. A pond in the forum, between the temples of Castor and Vesta, was called Lacus Juturnae. The nymph is said to have been beloved by Jupiter, who rewarded her with immortality and dominion over the waters…'

[←52]

According to Seyffert, Fontus was the Roman god of springs, son of Janus and Juturna, who had an altar in Rome on the Janiculum. A special festival, the Fontinalia, was held in his honour on the 13th October, at which garlands were thrown into the springs, and laid round the wells.

[←53]

Venilia was a nymph, daughter of Pilumnus, sister of Amata, wife of king Latinus, and mother of Turnus and Juturna by Daunus [Smith: Venilia]

[←54]

Metaphysics, [1005b19-20].

[←55]

[1005b23-24).

[←56]

[1011b13-14].

[←57]

[996b 26–30].

[←58]

Dick, M. B. Born in Heaven, Made on Earth: the making of the cult image in the ancient Near East. Winona Lake, Eisenbrauns, 1999.

[←59]

Timaeus 30a-b

[←60]

Guthrie, K. S. Porphyry's Life of Pythagoras, in The Pythagorean Sourcebook and Library: Red Wheel/Weiser, 1987

[←61]

See *Phaedrus* 247c, 247c-d & *Tim* 52a. In the *Phaedrus,* Socrates speaks of the region above heaven,

> never worthily sung by any earthly poet". It is, however, as I shall tell; for I must dare to speak the truth... the colourless, formless, and intangible truly existing essence, with which all true knowledge is concerned, holds this region and is visible only to the mind...

The implication of an ultimate reality beyond any human categorization except identity with itself, which nevertheless cannot be spoken of as unchanging is that, for analytical and practical purposes, all the possible categories of knowing are contingent and relative; and likewise, all attempted descriptions of the nature of its Being. The nature of reality is forever beyond our capacity to know on the one hand, and on the other, it is itself beyond any possible self-definition, not because it does or does not change, but because it embraces the all which contains both change and the unchanging.

[←62]

Note the resemblance of the description of the activity of the philosopher in the *Republic*, where it is said that the process of argument:

> ...treats assumptions not as principles, but as assumptions in the true sense, that is, as starting points and steps in the ascent to something which involves no assumption and is the first principle of everything; when it has grasped that principle it can again descend, by keeping to the consequences that follow from it, to a conclusion. The whole procedure involves nothing in the sensible world but moves solely through forms to forms, and finishes with forms. [*Rep*. 511b-c]

[←63]

We are familiar with the existence and importance of the individuated Greek cults, which eventually assumed an enormous importance in the later Roman Empire. Herodotus sometimes mentions these cults, but makes offhand references to the nature of the rites performed in these ceremonies, saying 'those who have experienced them will know what I mean'. The details were secret from the uninitiated. We do not know about the details of the cult of the Great Gods, the Kabiroi at Samothrace, on account of this reticence on the part of Herodotus. As for Mesopotamian cults, we know that the whole religious edifice functioned more or less as an assemblage of individuated cults. Those in the lower levels of society were simply not admitted to cult buildings at all, far less being admitted to worship or to participate in ritual. So far however, it has not been considered as a possibility that the whole thing was held together by a cult which might be restricted to an even smaller group, initiated into a cult whose ideas reflect a different kind of intellectual picture of the world

[←64]

Of course, there are exceptions to this rule. The journalist Richard Carlile gained access to Masonic ceremonies and documents in the early years of the 19th century, and wrote extensively about this cult. Though he was pilloried for his efforts at the time, it was not long before his 'Manual of Masonry' was being used in preference to official texts by the members of the craft – indeed, one of the two copies I own has clearly been marked by someone learning the rites of the craft.

[←65]

The question of the routes by which the ideas of the cult have moved around is nevertheless interesting, and in some instances, it is possible to point at likely nodes of contact and exchange. However, this question is beyond the scope of this book.

[←66]

I have defined the belief in the importance and efficacy of eternity as a cult for two principal reasons. The first is that this belief is clearly necessarily confined to a small group or network of individuals, for the simple reason that the nature of some of the beliefs belonging to the cult would be anathema to the wider population. Talking of a divine nature which has none of the properties of earthly existence could easily be misunderstood as atheism. The second reason for defining this pattern of belief as cultic is that, during the first millennium B.C. E., the belief system was more often than not accompanied by cult ritual.

[←67]

Those who invite for example the pre-eminent anthropologist of the ancient world, Walter Burkhert, as keynote speaker to a conference on the subject, are perhaps unconsciously exhibiting similar behaviour to tribal elders who place ‘first earth’ at the core of their cultic life.

[←68]

We are familiar with the Platonic tradition, which, through a number of twists and turns,has been hugely important in the west during the past two and a quarter millennia. It isn't a tradition which is continuously active, in that it is not always worked within, and sometimes it has lain fallow.

And sometimes this tradition has actively shaped institutions and patterns of belief.

Examples of the powerful influence of this tradition include the neo-Platonist writings, the take-up of Platonic ideas within the court and intellectual life of the Italian Renaissance, and its particularly fertile influence in the English Renaissance of the late sixteenth century. What is being suggested here is that a similar pattern of tradition existed in the ancient world before Plato, and that the Platonic writings, rather than instituting something entirely new, refashion an existing tradition of arcane cultic ideas, passed on largely through oral means, within small and select groups within institutions which offer a conducive and receptive environment for these ideas. Plato therefore is one highly important node in the tradition, particularly because he is deliberately trying to pass on a body of ideas being threatened by a wholly secular view of the world.

[←69]

If it is faulty to approach ancient societies which are replete with magical practice as supported by a theory of being which informs much of the detail of its belief and practice, then we will find out our error soon enough: we will find no evidence to support the claim which is not inexplicable by other means. Some of the key pieces of evidence in this book have no explanation in terms of existing interpretative schema: they are not treated as evidentially significant, even when they clearly absorbed much of the ancient economy, as well as the time and intellectual focus of the elite of the society in question.

[←70]

Most probably the feathered cloak also is intended to conjure the idea of the king functioning in another world, as the eagle can exist on land, but has its true existence in the air.

[←71]

[Rep. 368e-369a].

[←72]

[369b-370b].

[←73]

[370c].

[←74]

See *Timaeus* 31c-32c. References for this chapter are Plato: *The Republic* (Penguin edn., & *The Timaeus,* Penguin edn., both translated and introduced by Desmond Lee. Some of the ideas discussed here are explored in Onians, R.B: *The Origins of European Thought,* Cambridge University Press, 1951.

[←75]

Crawford and Whitehead, *Archaic and Classical Greece*, 10

[←76]

I.e., the aristocracy: decisions were always confirmed by an oracle of Apollo, and the aristocracy had charge of religious matters, and corruption is likely to have been a great temptation. However, to look at this kind of power as corruption is to retroject modern cynicism about political elites: the teleological view of the world equates fact and value, and therefore it follows as the corollary of social position that the judgements of the aristocracy are of a better calibre than the judgements of anyone else.

[←77]

c650-600 B.C. Fornara: *Archaic Times to the end of the Peloponnesian War*, 11.

[←78]

Fornara: op. cit., 15.

[←79]

Fornara: op. cit., 19.

[←80]

Politics ii, 11, 1-16.

[←81]

Hesperia 41, 96-127.

[←82]

Fornara, op. cit., 11.

[←83]

Crawford and Whitehead, op. cit., 38, 63.

[←84]

'kosmos' is probably cognate with the Arabic kesem, to distribute, divide; or Hebrew kesem, to dress the hair. The Greek word connotes order, arrangement, regularity; battle array; institution; discipline; ornament, attire; praise; world, universe, mankind.

[←85]

K 2694 + K 3050 (Asb L^4). Copy: Lehmann, Šamaš-šum-ukîn pls. 34-39. Edition: Streck, Asb pp. 253-271. RIM siglum: A.0.113.L4 (RIMA 6). New translation of the lines by Simo Parpola.

[←86]

Morris Jastrow: 'The Liver as the Seat of the Soul' pp 143-68, in D. G. Lyon and G.F. Moore, eds, *Studies in the History of Religions Presented to Crawford Howell Toy*, New York, 1912.

[←87]

Sima Qian, *Shiji*, Chapter 6.

[←88]

Arthur Koestler, *The Lotus and the Robot*, 1960, (p.54-63).

[←89]

In her book *Myths from Mesopotamia,* Stephanie Dalley states incorrectly [p. 183] that the Assyrian tablets come from Assur, and seems to think that they belong to the late second millennium, which would make them nearly contemporary with the Egyptian tablet, rather than belonging to the 7th century B.C. Further, Dalley's version is not a complete translation of all the fragments - compare for example the version in Heidel's *The Babylonian Genesis* [pp. 147--53]. The texts were edited in 1915 by Knudtzon: *Die El Amarna Tafeln*, 964-8; and Picchioni in 1981: *Il poemetto di Adapa*.

[←90]

Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia (ARAB), vol. II s.985ff. Luckenbill.

[←91]

see *State Letters of Assyria*, (SLA) 137, Pfeiffer [= [Harper 992]:

"The king is my god and the king is (to me) as the morning light"
[Rev. line 17]. Thus the relationship of the Assyrian citizen to the king is as the king to a god: to the king's servant the king might as well be a god. Concerning the second part of the metaphor, compare the fact that in Egypt

"the king's accession was timed for sunrise, and the same verb denoted the sun's daily appearance and the appearance of the Pharaoh at public functions"
[*Kingship and the Gods*, ch. 13, p148, Frankfort].

[←92]

This arrangement is drawn from the classification of royal functions in Pfeiffer's *State Letters of Assyria*.

[←93]

Enki-Ea: "the broad eared one who knows all that has a name... budgets the accounts..." [Roux, G. *Ancient Iraq*, p95].

[←94]

6 *Myths from Mesopotamia*, p182. Parallels with Greek mythology are obvious (Prometheus, for example); in Plato's *Timaeus* the Demiourgos is sometimes referred to as a craftsman, and both the Demiourgos and Adapa are closely connected with music as well as the order of the cosmos: Plato's craftsman constructs the universe according to a scheme of Pythagorean harmony, and a musical instrument (a drum) used in Assyrian cultic contexts was termed an "Adapa" (similar to the tegu). Discipline and order are inevitably associated with music, and vice versa.

[←95]

Heidel, op. cit., p152. This probably implies that the supply of fish for the temple at Eridu was not compulsory. In the light of the events later in the text, one might guess that the privilege was granted to prevent future damage to the wings of the south wind.

[←96]

ARAB, vol. II, s986

[←97]

Compare the words spoken by Anu in the Myth of the Adapa: "why did Ea disclose to wretched mankind the ways of heaven and earth...?" Dalley, op. cit., p187

[←98]

This probably means that Ashurbanipal received oracular instructions from Ea and other gods via an assembly of diviners, along the lines suggested in Esarhaddon's text, 'The renewal of the gods', published in Borger's *Die Inschriften Asarhaddons*. In this text Esarhaddon says that he 'arranged diviners in groups in order to obtain a favourable oracular pronouncement'. This was in connection with the renewal of the cult images. Ea of course was the god of craftsmen.

[←99]

We might take Ashurbanipal's claims with a pinch of salt. It is likely that the desire to master the scribal skills was perfectly genuine, precisely because it was understood as a sign that the king had been granted proximity to the ways of the divine and marked him out for his special role in the Assyrian political and religious structure. However, because it was a requirement of the position, it is natural to expect the claim to be made that he mastered the skills - and with relative ease in comparison with other mortals: his skill at mathematics must reflect the fact that he belongs to a different category of human being. Modern comparisons which suggest themselves include the claim by Elizabeth the First of England that she translated Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy from the Greek in a mere twenty-four hours, or the pretensions of Queen Cristina of Sweden to classical scholarship (noted by Descartes to be unjustified).

[←100]

ARAB, vol. II, s.986. See also Reade, J, *Assyrian Sculpture*, pl. 98, showing Ashurbanipal inspecting the booty of Babylon from the vantage point of a chariot [British Museum, Room 89]; also pl.83; pl. 80 [both British Museum, Room 17], showing Ashurbanipal in the course of a lion hunt; and pl. 79 [British Museum, Room 17] shows him in preparation for the same. Pl. 69 & 79 show Sennacherib at Lachish in a ninth century style of chariot [both Room 17].

[←101]

See the letter to the king from Marduk-shum-usur, in which he says that Assur had spoken to the king's grandfather in a dream saying:

O wise one... you, the king, the lord of kings, are the grandson of the wise one and Adapa... the extent of your knowledge surpasses that... of all the craftsmen - SLA 248 [= Harper 923]. According to the "Enuma Elish" [Heidel, op. cit. p148, frag. no 1, lines 6 & 10.]:

Ea had created him (Adapa) as a leader among mankind... with the bakers he does the baking...

[←102]

Ashurbanipal's Coronation Hymn illustrates some of the qualities he was expected to manifest: "may eloquence, understanding, truth and justice be given to him as a gift" (line 8) *State Archives of Assyria* (SAA) vol. III, pp26-7], Helsinki.

[←103]

The nearest we have to a contemporary discussion of kingship and magnanimity is in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*: the monarch can possess virtues, the "crown" of which is magnanimity, because he can act most freely. For Aristotle virtue could only be achieved through action, therefore those whose choices and actions were limited were necessarily less virtuous. If the king is the most virtuous and just in the land, it follows (according to Aristotle's prescription) that a king must act in certain ways if he is to be seen to be just and virtuous, to be a legitimate king. He says that he,

> since he deserves most, must be good, in the highest degree; for the better man always deserves more, and the best man most. Therefore the truly magnanimous man must be good. And greatness in every virtue would seem to be characteristic of the magnanimous man [*Nicomachean Ethics* 1123b].

The Aristotelian prescription holds broadly for the moral universe of the Assyrian kings in the eighth and seventh centuries B.C., since both systems are honour based. The Assyrian king deserves his wealth and power because he has virtue, and must act in order to possess his virtue.

[←104]

ARAB, vol. II, s.986

[←105]

ARAB, vol. II, s.987. Compare lines 5-7 of Ashurbanipal's Coronation Hymn which lists items understood as good in themselves as metaphors for kingship:

just as grain and silver, oil [the catt]le of Shakkan and the salt of Bariku are good, so may Ashurbanipal, king of Assyria, be agreeable to the gods [of his] land! [SAA vol. III, pp26-7].

[←106]

Compare line 13 of the Coronation Hymn:

He who in his heart utters improprieties against the king - his foundation is (but) wind, the hem of his garment is (but) litter.

The hem of a garment was frequently used in swearing oaths and also as a seal in legal and financial contexts [SAA vol. III, p27].

[←107]

The office of priest, for example, is not distinguished by a term which we can easily equate with "priest". The kalu priest is designated simply "kalu". In other words, the function of these officials is not seen as something apart from the function of the rest of the Assyrian social structure: religion and society are inextricably intertwined, having never been conceived as separate ways of looking at the world (Compare for example the elaborate intertwining of everyday life and the understanding of the structure of the world illustrated by Marcel Griaule's study of Dogon belief: *Conversations with Ogotemeli*). To read "kalu" simply as a name for a position in the context of a highly ritualised culture is a mistake, yet it remains the common practice of scholars to transliterate such words in their translations, as if the meaning has little or no bearing on the overall sense of the passage. The term "apkallum" (used to describe Adapa's priesthood of Ea at Eridu) is an Assyrian term indicating a "mortal sage", though in connection with Adapa I think the term has a more precise technical meaning not well served by such a translation.

In any case, there is little evidence that people thought in this way. Even if someone did steal privileges by virtue of his power to do so, the act would be understood and explained within a moral framework, and the success of the act would depend on the will of the gods (it is important to understand that we are not dealing with a familiar moral universe: it is an honour based system, with its own characteristic values). When Esarhaddon entered Nineveh and sat on the throne of his father, he describes how

favourable powers drew close in heaven and earth... messages of gods and goddesses they sent me continuously and gave me courage [Borger, Rykle *Die Inschriften Asarhaddons* (AfO Beiheft 9) 1959, Nin. A-F Ep. 2] (translation supplied by A.T.L. Kuhrt).

[←108]

The king is described as "king of kings", which concept was understood as an essential component in the function of his kingship, and not merely as a vainglorious styling. That is, the totality of his kingship is in itself of functional importance.

[←109]

Cf. Plato, *Timaeus* 31c-32c; also Aristotle, *Politics* 1277a; *Nicomachean Ethics* Bk X, chap. 8, concerning connection with the gods through completion.

[←110]

That completion was understood as a virtue in itself is illustrated by the fact that, in Mesopotamia and elsewhere, sin was often countered not by an attempt to undo the sin directly, but by the perfect performance of rituals and incantations. Each of these, properly performed, counted towards the expiation of the sin, irrespective of the nature of the original act. Thus, to undo the damage done by sin, it is not necessary to repair the damage, to make good the imperfection, directly (often impossible - see the "Sin of Sargon" text in SAA vol. IV, Starr): to undertake repair without regard to context but complete attention to purpose is the requirement. See SLA 323 [= Harper 629], lines 1317, for an illustration of the perceived value of abstract ritual completions. (13-17?)

[←111]

The king was "chosen" by the gods because of his excellence and his virtue, and he was the person responsible for performing actions of key importance. Everything associated with the ritual being performed was of equal and critical importance: upon the timing of the ritual depended its success - see for example SLA 342 [= Harper 406], where the auspicious day for a sacrifice is discussed; see also SLA 344 [= Harper 365], and SLA 328 [= Harper 356]. Oaths were a matter for auspicious days also, and the king was available to be visited likewise only when the day was judged right - see SLA 341 [= Harper 384]. The throne room relief is in the Nimrud gallery [19] of the British Museum., from the palace of Ashurnasirpal II.

[←112]

Heidel, op. cit. pp. 23-4 [tablet I, lines 132-45] See also pp. 75-81 for the surviving Greek accounts by Berossus and Alexander Polyhistor. The struggle against chaos is vividly illustrated in the palace reliefs according to the metaphor of the battle between Marduk and Tiamat: see room 26 in the British Museum. (the Assyrian Transept). The king is also the final judge (on earth), meaning that his insight into the true nature of matters is second to none - see SLA 322 [= Harper 1006]

[←113]

SLA 327 [= Harper 565], illustrates the contemporary view that no contact with the celestial world is possible except through observation.

[←114]

Though a letter suggests that part of the aura of the king was the power to do exactly as he wished - see SLA 324 [= Harper 137]. To those lower down the social scale in Assyria this might count as divinity; but to those able to juggle with the pattern of ideas within which Assyrian royalty functioned, it would connote no more than proximity with the divine - see SLA 137 [= Harper 992].

[←115]

Ashur is designated "King of Kings" in the so-called "Ashur Charter" of Sargon II: see Saggs, H.W.F. "Historical Texts and Fragments of Sargon II of Assyria", I. "The Assur Charter" IRAQ 37, 1975.

[←116]

SLA 328 [= Harper 356]; see also SLA 342 [= Harper 356]; SLA 344 [= Harper 365]; SLA 345 [= Harper 652]. The same kind of equation was made between the geography of the Mesopotamian world and the surface of the moon at the time of lunar eclipse - see SLA 322 [= Harper 1006]. Roaf in his *Cultural Atlas of Mesopotamia* appears to illustrate this letter, but gives no citation (22 May 678 B.C.E). See also SLA 324 [= Harper 137]. See also Parpola's doctoral thesis, LAS, 1971, Appendix 3B, from which this information is drawn.

[←117]

Prestige and propaganda are naturally of significance in a world dominated by metaphors (the king being a metaphor for the divine), but the state machine is driven by, both the internal logic of its theology, and the theology functioning as a tool of state.

[←118]

Sharru, the Akkadian term for king, may have been understood in the Neo-Assyrian period to carry some of the connotations of the Sumerian SAR, which has the meanings: to multiply, to gather, to let gather, and to drive together. Hence perhaps the association of Neo-Assyrian kings with shepherdship, which has no parallel in the earlier periods of Assyrian history. Sharru is not specific to any kind of ruler and can be applied to petty kings and local rulers (the term was applied to rulers in the Zagros region and also to the kinglets in the Egyptian Delta). The term appears to imply sole power, rather than international scale of operation. The term, "king of the totality", was used as far back as the Agade period, but it is generally held that Shamshi-Adad I used it as a newly coined term. Its use often reflects a situation where control is total, though its precise meaning is debated. See Larsen's *Power and Propaganda.*

[←119]

"In Addaru, a favourable month, on... a festival day of Nabu, I joyfully entered Nineveh, city of my lordship, and seated myself gladly on the throne of my father. The southwind blew, the breath of Ea, a wind whose blowing is favourable to the practice of kingship..." [Borger, *Die Inschriften Asarhaddons*]

[←120]

In line 8 Adapa is described, curiously, as "the skilful, the exceedingly wise among the Anunnaki..." This implies divinity as does the fact that he is Ea's son. Why therefore does the myth treat Adapa as mortal?

[←121]

It is also spoken of as the "breath of Ea" by Esarhaddon, which confirms the essential identity of the different elements in the myth [Borger, *Die Inschriften Asarhaddons*].

[←122]

"May Shamash, king of heaven and earth, elevate you to shepherdship over the four [region]s!" [line 1 of the Coronation Hymn, SAA vol. III]

[←123]

Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (ANET), from: "I will praise the lord of wisdom" p. 435, trans. R.H. Pfeiffer.

[←124]

Lambert, W.G. "The great battle of the Mesopotamian religious year: the conflict in the Akitu House" in IRAQ 25, 1963, pp. 189-90.

[←125]

AfO XVII, p.315 F4. Lambert refers also to AfO XIX, p.118 (Archiv für Orientforschung).

[←126]

E. Ebling, Parfumrezepte und kultische Texte aus Assur (Pl. 26, 13). Roma, Pontificio Institutum Biblicum, 1950

[←127]

Saggs, H.W.F. "Historical Texts and Fragments of Sargon II of Assyria", I. The Assur Charter, IRAQ 37, 1975, line 36a, in which Sargon equates the making firm of his dynasty and the giving of a "sure foundation to the throne base" (in connection with the restoration of freedom from taxes for the citizens of Ashur): the annual defeat of Tiamat and the installation of Marduk (and his ishiak) is part of the same complex of ideas. In order that the creation of order out of chaos is maximal the condition of the throne base or dais before the contest is unfixed and "rolling"; afterwards it is fixed and provides a sure foundation to the throne base (elsewhere in the text Assur is equated with Enlil, "without whom they cannot give final judgement" (line 4), and Enlil is described in the same place as GISH - which is the determinative for throne). Equating Assur and Enlil yokes the king to the mythology in another way: the king becomes the agent of the Sumerian god and thus responsible for the re-enactment of the primal battles enshrined in the tradition. Hence the description of Ashur as "the seat of the dynasty, the most ancient of settlements" (line 12): it is the same place, and the same actions occur. Assur is also spoken of as "the city of privilege" (line 12), which recalls the exemption of Eridu in the myth of Adapa.

[←128]

IRAQ V, p.61,14 = PSBA XXII, p.367,1. See Reade, J, Assyrian Sculpture, pl.73, which shows Sennacherib inspecting the booty from Lachish, mounted upon a throne. The royal party, led by the crown prince, seems to be congratulating him upon his victory. The iconography of the sculptures works on the basis of the recapitulation and variation on identifiable themes: the victory over chaos stands behind many of the images.

[←129]

The ritual of the substitute king, discussed by Lambert, makes sense only if the likeness of the king and his actions was understood to be sufficient to draw the malefic influences onto the substitute [see also Parpola's doct. thesis: LAS pt. 2]. Note also that in the texts of the queries to the sungod, the ritual requests that the god "be present" in the sacrificial animal [SAA vol. IV].

[←130]

Pritchard, ANET pp106--9.